STREET & SMITH'S

WILD WEST WEEKLY

AUGUST 21, 1937

10

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

KID WOLF'S PESO TRAIL

By WARD M. STEVENS

L. W. SWEET
FOUNDER

$1 brings your choice of these DIAMONDS and WATCHES

10 MONTHS TO PAY

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

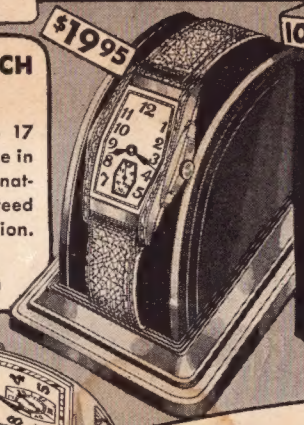
10¢ A DAY

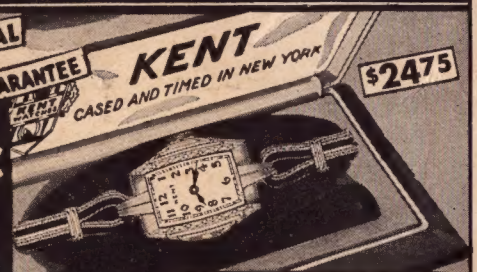
17 JEWEL WATCH for MEN

K223—Attractive 17 jewel watch with case in charm and color of natural gold. Guaranteed to give you satisfaction. Regular $30 value.

$1.70 a month

$19.95

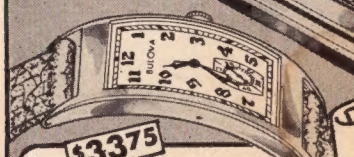




$24.75

14K GOLD-17 JEWELS

P317—Tiny new 14K solid yellow gold watch with guaranteed 17 jewel movement. Black silk cord band. Regularly $35. **$2.38 a month**



$33.75

M211—Bulova's new feature—the Minute-Man 17 jewel curved watch in charm and color of natural gold. Leather strap.

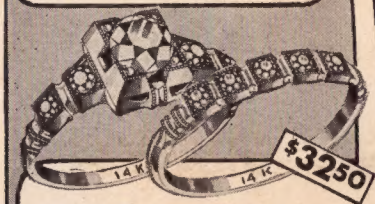
$3.28 a month

Think of it—as little as 10c a day (paid monthly) will enable you to own one of these beautiful Diamonds or Watches. I'll send your choice of these bargains for approval and 10-day trial. Simply put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address and number of the article wanted. Tell me your age (must be over 20), occupation, employer and a few facts about yourself. Information held confidential—no direct inquiries will be made. I'll open a 10-month Charge Account for you and send selection for approval. If you are not satisfied, send it back and I'll refund your dollar. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 small monthly payments. Send your order today.

$29.75

R126—Bulova's newest feature—the Lady Bulova—a tiny 17 jewel watch in charm and color of natural gold.

$2.88 a month



$32.50

A7/C16—Matched Bridal Ensemble in the newest 14K natural gold. 5 diamonds in each ring. Exceptional value at this low price.

$3.15 a month

$29.95

A137—Gorgeous new 14K white gold engagement ring. Large center diamond of high quality; 2 other diamonds

$2.90 a month

20c A DAY buys this ¼ CARAT DIAMOND RING

$57.50

A341—Direct importing makes this low price possible. ¼ carat quality diamond with 2 other diamonds in 14K natural gold engagement ring. Reg. $75 value.

$5.65 a month

$19.75

1185—Massive 10K natural gold 2 Diamond initial ring for men. Initial on black onyx.

$1.88 a month

C10—7 diamond wedding ring in 14K white gold. Diamonds in beautiful step arrangement. A pretty ring priced low.

$1.88 a month

$19.75

L. W. Sweet Inc.

MAIL ORDER DIVISION of FINLAY STRAUS

Dept. 847-H **1670 BROADWAY · NEW YORK**

FREE TO ADULTS

Complete Catalog of Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry and Silverware all on Ten Months Terms, sent FREE upon request.

The depression's over

● THE question is, are you over the depression? Tough? You bet it was—it was the toughest depression this country ever had. But listen: *The future is the brightest that ever beckoned a man.* Opportunity calls from every side—calls to ambitious and trained men! If you have the ambition, the International Correspondence Schools can supply the training. Get going! Snap out of it! Hurry this coupon along to Scranton.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 4903-J, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Automobile Mechanic	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Millinery	☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering	

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

STREET & SMITH'S
WILD WEST WEEKLY
FOUNDED 1902

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 Six Months, $2.00 Single Copies, 10 Cents

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

Vol. 113, No. 2 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 21, 1937 Whole No. 1818

Cover Picture—Scene from "Kid Wolf's Peso Trail . . . *Painted by H. W. Scott*

THREE COMPLETE WESTERN NOVELETTES

Kid Wolf's Peso Trail . . . . . *Ward M. Stevens* . . 8
It leads the Soldier o' Misfortune into a hull mess o' gun trouble.

Bitterroot Gun Hawks . . . . . *Cleve Endicott* . . . 57
The which are none other than the four saddle pards from Circle J.

Crazy Q's Rattlesnake Trail . . . . *George C. Henderson* . . 89
The Diamondback killers do their best to put Buckaroo out o' business.

FIVE COMPLETE WESTERN STORIES

A Bad Case O' Gun Itch . . . . . *William A. Todd* . . 34
Nothin' but shootin' kin git rid of it.

Calamity Rides Misery Basin . . . . *Lee Bond* 46
An' where the gloomy waddy rides, trouble's never far away.

Cougar Hombre . . . . . *Philip F. Deere* . . . 78
He's a plumb mysterious cuss, but he shore kin sling lead.

Fargo Neal's Murder Trail 112
A story in pictures an' text.

Pardner's Vengeance . . . . . *Kent Bennett* . . . 116
A true story of the wild West.

BRIEF WESTERN FACT STORIES

A Kind-hearted Cowboy . . . 33 **The Bad Man's Invitation** . . 111

DEPARTMENTS

Fiddlin' Joe's Song Corral 123

The Wranglers Corner 125

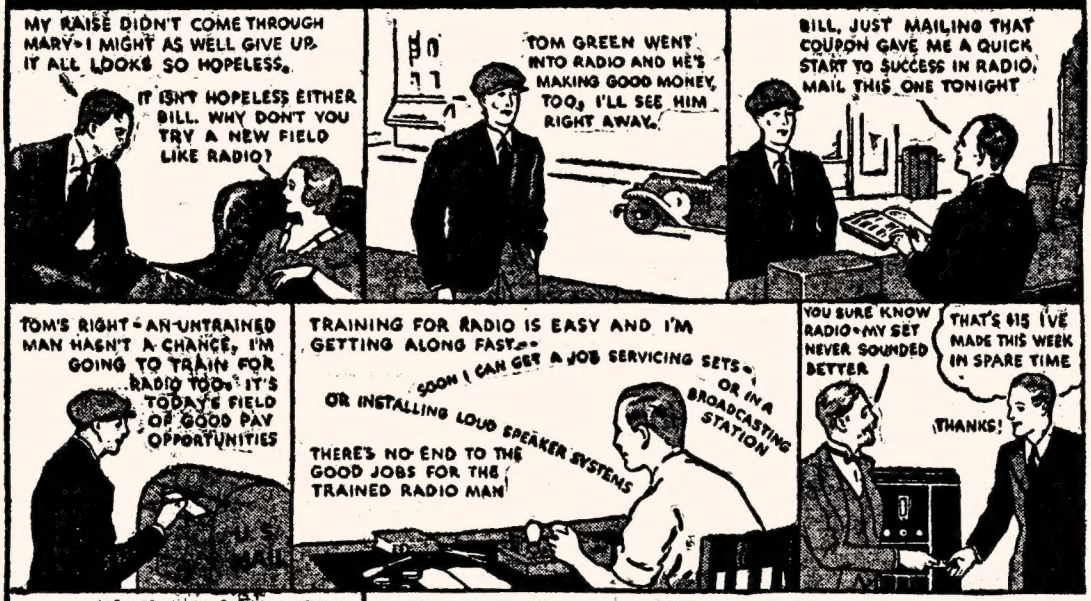
Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Artemas Holmes, President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President; Gerald H. Smith, Secretary; A. Lawrance Holmes, Assistant Secretary. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 8, 1911, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries, except The Guianas and British Honduras, $5.00 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, $7.00 per year.

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. 16

To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!


MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.
IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?
TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.
BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT
TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES
TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST.
SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS, OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS
THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN
YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER
THAT'S $15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME
THANKS!
N.R.I. TRAINING CERTAINLY PAYS. OUR MONEY WORRIES ARE OVER AND WE'VE A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO.
OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *In Your Spare Time For A* GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
The man who has directed the home study training of more men for Radio than any other man in America.

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time servicing jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that have made good spare time money for hundreds of fellows. I send special equipment which gives you practical experience—shows you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important Radio principles.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning; tells about my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a post card—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7HD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS

N.R.I. Training Increases Yearly Salary $1,200

"Since securing my operator's license through N. R. I. Training, I've been regularly employed and am now chief engineer with WJBY. My salary has increased $1,200 in Radio." — JULIUS C. VESSELS, Station WJBY, Gadsden, Alabama.

$10 to $25 a Week in Spare Time

"I am making from $10 to $25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I."—WM. F. RUPP, 130 W. 6th St., Conshohocken, Pa.

$3,500 a Year in Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio service business of my own, and have averaged over $3,500 a year."—T. J. TELAAK, 567 Broadway, Buffalo, N. Y.

THIS FREE BOOK HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF MEN MAKE MORE MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7HD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

Arrest Him, Officer!

I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!

Follow This Man!

SECRET Service Operator No. 38 is on the job . . . *follow him* through all the excitement of his chase after the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints in the murdered girl's room that help him solve the great mystery! BETTER than fiction because every word is TRUE. No obligation. Just mail me the coupon and get—

FREE The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this—it may open your eyes to the great opportunity for YOU as a well paid Finger Print Expert. This is a young, *fast-growing* profession. The kind of work you would like. Excitement! Thrills! Travel! *A regular monthly salary.* Reward money. *And remember:* graduates of this school HEAD 47% of *all* Identification Bureaus in the U. S. Quick! Mail the Coupon NOW and I'll send you these Free Confidential Reports!

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. C-277 Chicago, Illinois

Institute of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. C-277 Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatsoever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

BE A
Traffic Manager
Big Pay—Big Opportunity

Big business needs trained traffic men and pays them well. Train in your spare time for this highly profitable, growing profession. Low cost; easy terms.
Write now for valuable 64-page book—FREE.
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 865-T, Chicago

Classified Advertising

Detectives—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Work home or travel. DETECTIVE particulars free. Experience unnecessary. Write, GEORGE WAGONER, 2640-A Broadway, New York.

BECOME A SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTIVE. Particulars free. International Secret Service Institute, SSC 87, Hoboken, N. J.

Patents Secured

PATENTS—Reasonable terms. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 911-J, Washington, D. C.

Help Wanted—Instructions

FOREST JOBS AVAILABLE $125-$175 MONTH. Cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify immediately. Write Rayson Service C-59, Denver, Colo.

Photo Finishing—Developing

AT LAST! All your prints in natural color. Amazingly beautiful. Roll developed, 8 natural color prints, 25c. Reprints, 3c. Fast service. Natural Color Photo, C-59, Janesville, Wis.

Natural Remedy

NATURE'S REMEDY for chronic constipation. If interested send $1.00 for details. Box 191, Jackson Heights, N. Y.

Female Help Wanted

SPECIAL WORK for housewives. Earn to $16 weekly and your own dresses free to wear and show. No canvassing or investment. Experience not necessary. Fashion Frocks, Dept. BC-1023, Cincinnati, O.

PILES DON'T BE CUT Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of **Page's Pile Tablets** and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. **E. R. Page Co., 416-B13 Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.**

MEN PAST 40

Impaired vigor, caused by tired, sluggish glands or mental and physical fatigue, is often strengthened after taking **ZO-AK TABLETS** for **ONE MONTH**—or money back. Zo-ak contains newly discovered hormone (gland activator), prescribed by many doctors here and abroad for this very purpose. Sold and recommended by all good druggists. Booklet by registered physician free. **ZO-AK CO., 50 W. 45th St. New York.** Ask for Economy Size and save $1.

New Invention! WITH SUPERCHARGE PRINCIPLE SAVES GAS

MORE SPEED
MORE POWER
NEW MOTOR LIFE
QUICKER STARTING
UP TO 30% GAS SAVINGS

USERS REPORT 3 TO 7 MILES MORE PER GALLON

MOTORIST SAVES $180.00 A YEAR

"On an International truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas."—*James Seeley, N. Y.*

"On my V-8 Ford, it works miracles. Its added power, acceleration and top speed has sold me. The results are unbelievable."—*Ralph Fields, Mass.*

"Very glad to say, the Buick showed an increase of 5 miles more per gallon."—*A. V. Grove, Washington.*

"On my Plymouth, I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of $15 a month or $180 a year."—*F. S. Peck, Calif.*

"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—*L. V. Sweet, Pa.*

"My Chevrolet certainly runs smoother, has more power and snap to it since I put the Vacu-Matic on."—*J. H. Nelson, Minn.*

"On my Dodge 8 I am getting 6 more miles per gal., with more power and pick-up, which is all anyone could ask."—*Lee D. Esty, Calif.*

"I have twelve Vacu-matics on cars now, and they all show an increase in mileage. The car owners are very well pleased."—*Fred Taylor, Okla.*

"I averaged 25 miles per gallon on a trip with a model A Ford at 40 miles per hour, where before I only averaged 20. Also better pickup and smoother running.—*Wm. Lyons, Calif.*

"I have been placing Vacu-matics on expert mechanics' cars. All are well pleased."—*J. W. Donahue, W. Va.*

VACU-MATIC

the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"

ROTARY PUMPING

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, quicker starting, greater speed and smoother running.

Automatic — Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—stream-lining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The sensational money-saving invention! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds.

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the super charger principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. You can instantly tell the difference in added power and motor performance — you quickly notice the cash savings on gasoline.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

Free Details

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

Agents and Salesmen

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

—FREE OFFER COUPON—

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-321 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen! Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in selling proposition.

The VACU-MATIC Co., Wauwatosa, Wis.

FALSE TEETH

60 DAYS TRIAL

I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford **to pay big prices.** I have been making dental plates for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction or they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and have saved money.

SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you do not send **FREE** one cent—just your name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.
440 W. Huron St., Dept. 851, Chicago, Illinois

BECOME AN EXPERT

ACCOUNTANT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn $2,000 to $15,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. Only 16,000 Certified Public Accountants in the U. S. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C.P.A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C.P.A.'s, including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays."

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 865-H Chicago
The School That Has Trained Over 1,400 C. P. A.'s

A Book of Plain Facts for RECTAL SUFFERERS

Read this enlightening and encouraging book. Describes the mild McCleary treatment for Hemorrhoids (Piles), Fistula and all non-malignant rectal ailments at McCleary Clinic. Book and reference list FREE.

McCLEARY CLINIC
861 ELMS BLVD., EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MO.

AGENTS UP TO $50 IN A WEEK

Big cash profits for you; full or spare time. Over 250 household necessities—things people must buy. Proven fast sellers; steady repeaters, earnings very first day. FORD TUDOR SEDAN GIVEN YOU AS BONUS. I'll show you how to start at once; send you everything—Big Display Outfit and quick cash plans. Details FREE—no obligation. Just send name on postcard.

ALBERT MILLS, 4075 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

AUTHORS & POETS

POEMS • PLAYS SHORT STORIES

WANTED FOR PUBLICATION IN

"Yearbook of Contemporary Americans" Series

PRIZES OFFERED
ALSO FULL-LENGTH NOVELS & BIOGRAPHIES

Write or send manuscripts to:

RENAISSANCE BOOK COMPANY
126 Lexington Avenue
New York, N. Y.

YOUR STARS

WITH FORECAST FOR THE FUTURE
BY JUNIUS B. SMITH

Know Yourself!

When were you born? Your birthday has a lot of influence on your life, past, present and future.

This is not a fortune telling book—the information in it is based upon scientific calculations. Millions of character studies were made over a long period of years and the conclusions reached are surprisingly accurate when applied to other people—*you, for instance.*

You need this book. You will find much pleasure and interest in it.

This book will be sent postpaid upon receipt of twenty-five cents by the publishers.

YOUR STARS
STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC.
79 SEVENTH AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.

BROADCAST and AMAZE Your Friends!

Put on your own broadcast with the WALCO MIKE, most entertaining radio device yet produced. Sing, laugh, talk, crack jokes from another room and your radio will produce every sound as though you were miles away at a regular broadcasting station.

MARVELOUS FUN AT PARTIES

Imitate the big radio stars and crooners. Do a "Ben Bernie" or "Rudy Vallee." No end of pleasure for grown-ups or kiddies. Excellent training in elocution, "Amateur Hour" practice, or broadcast announcing. Special cut-out button allows you to switch from home broadcasting to regular radio reception in an instant. Can not injure your radio in any way.

THE WALCO MIKE
In handsome black metal. Long cord. Less than a minute to attach to any radio without tools. Fully guaranteed.
ONLY $1

SEND NO MONEY

5 Days Trial at Our Risk!

Merely mail the coupon. On delivery pay postman $1 plus few cents postage. If not delighted return it in 5 days and your $1 refunded at once.

ELECTRICAL LABORATORIES CO., Dept. 142
49 East 21st St., New York, N. Y.

Send Walco Mike, with complete instructions. Will pay postman $1, plus few cents postage. If not delighted, will return in 5 days for $1 refund.

☐ Check here if ENCLOSING $1—thus saving postage charge. Same refund guarantee applies.

Name .....

Address .....

☐ Check here for chromium De Luxe model, $1.39.

FREE

SUITS O'COATS PANTS GIVEN AS BONUS BESIDES LARGE CASH PROFITS PREMIUMS AND GIFTS

Sell only (4) suits to get a FREE SUIT. No limit to number of FREE garments you may earn. Wholesale prices $17.99—$21.99—$24.99 Sample line FREE. No experience needed to make big money. All garments individually cut and tailored to measure. Satisfaction or money back guarantee.

SQUARE DEAL TAILORING CO., Inc.
316 W. VAN BUREN ST., Dept. X-1, CHICAGO, ILL.

BIG Free BOOK ON CRIME CASES

Fascinating book on Scientifically solved true crime cases sent absolutely free to those over 17. Also tells how to get into Scientific Crime Detection. Home Study. New opportunities. Travel. Steady Employment. Experience not necessary. Very easy terms.

SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
C & O Bldg., J. T. Burdette, Pres., Dept. 7H7, Huntington, West Virginia

---

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c 3 for $1.00

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (anysize) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C.O.D. 78c plus postage or send 89c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 104 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 767-K, Chicago

---

Train for ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS AT COYNE

The great Coyne Shops in Chicago have a world-wide reputation for training ambitious fellows for this big-pay field in only 12 weeks. Then you get **lifetime graduate employment service.** By my new plan YOU can take advantage of their wonderful method of learning-by-doing NOW—no need to lose time and money while you strive and save to raise the necessary tuition.

I WILL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

I have a plan where many **get training first.** Then they have **over a year** to pay for their training in **easy monthly payments, starting 60 days after the regular 3-months training period is over,** or 5 months from the day they start school. If you will write to me at once I will send you complete details of this sensational new plan, together with the **Big Free** illustrated **Book** telling all about COYNE and how **many earn while learning** and training you can get there **without book study** or useless theory.

H. C. Lewis

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. C7-45, Chicago, Illinois

MR. H. C. LEWIS, President
Dept. C7-45, 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.
Send me all details of your "pay-tuition-after-graduation" plan and your big FREE catalog.

NAME ..... AGE....
ADDRESS .....
CITY ..... STATE .....

Kidneys Must Clean Out Acids

The only way your body can clean out Acids and poisonous wastes from your blood is through 9 million tiny, delicate Kidney tubes or filters, but beware of cheap, drastic, irritating drugs. If functional Kidney or Bladder disorders make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Backache, Circles Under Eyes, Dizziness, Rheumatic Pains, Acidity, Burning, Smarting or Itching, don't take chances. Get the Doctor's guaranteed prescription called Cystex (Siss-Tex). Works fast, safe and sure. In 48 hours it must bring new vitality, and is guaranteed to do the work in one week or money back on return of empty package. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

GET A GOVERNMENT JOB

START
$1260 to $2100 Year

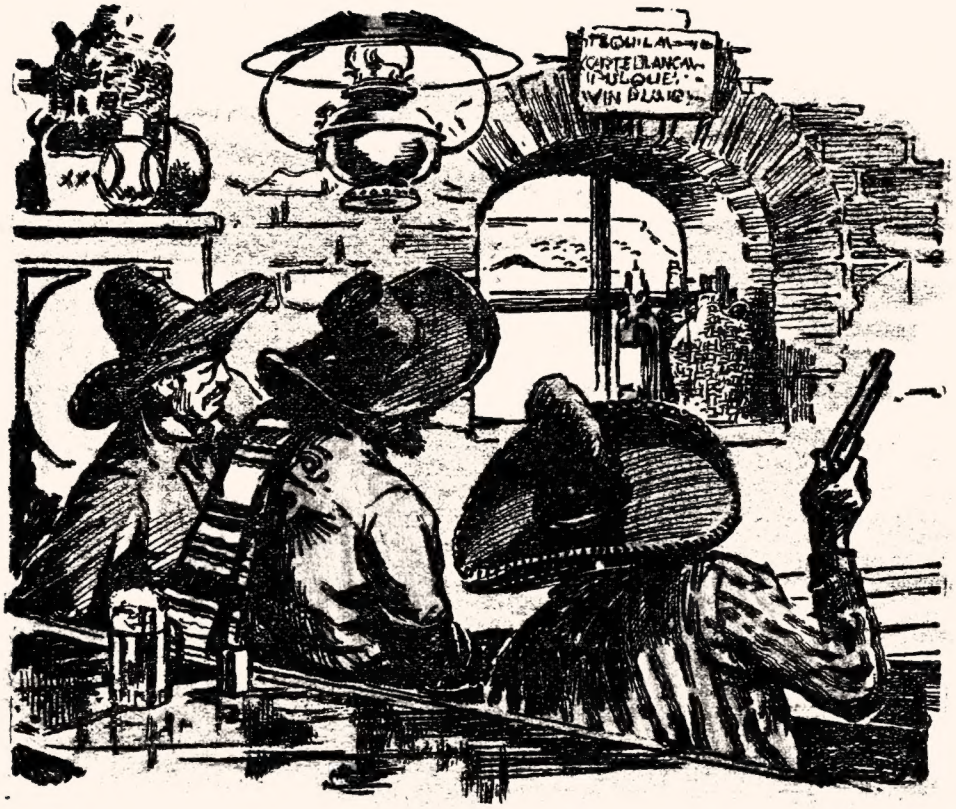
42,000 appointments last year.
Men—Women
Common Education Usually Sufficient
Mail Coupon today sure.

COUPON

Franklin Institute, Dept. F 195, Rochester, N.Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs. (2) Tell me immediately how to get one of these jobs.

Name.....
Address.....



KID WOLF'S

By Ward M. Stevens

Author of "Sonny Tabor's Oregon Boot," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ROUGH-HOUSE ON THE RIO.

THE Texas Ranger, Clint McKay, was in a tight spot, and he knew it. He was almost certain that he had been spotted and that his life wasn't worth a copper centavo. His chances of getting out of the Two Nations Saloon were exceedingly slim.

Although his badge was pinned to the underside of his leather vest and out of sight, it seemed to him that every eye in the long lamplit room was fixed upon it. That Ranger star seemed to be burning into his skin. The weight of his stag-handled Colt .44 against his right hip failed to reassure him. They were too many for him. And trouble was due to pop at any moment.

The Ranger gave no outward indication of being worried. Calmly rolling a cigarette, he struck a match

PESO TRAIL

and lighted it carelessly. From his table where he sat alone, he shot a glance toward the bar. Six or seven Mexicans were lined up with their backs to it, and staring at *him*. There was smoldering hatred in their sullen eyes, and more than one of them had a hand on the butt of a six-gun.

On the "sober side" of the bar, were the proprietor of the saloon and the bartender—a swarthy breed in a soiled white apron. The proprietor was an American, the only one in the place except Ranger McKay.

McKay gulped down the drink of tequila that he had ordered, tried not to make a face as the fiery, colorless liquor rolled over his tongue, and chewed a slice of salted lemon for a chaser. Just what was going to happen, or when, he had no idea, but he did have a hunch that it would be soon.

"Well, stranger, have one on me, this time," said the proprietor, coming around the end of the bar and taking a seat opposite his customer at the small table. "A tequila, Enrique!" he called to his bartender, "and a little tornado juice fer me."

"Thanks," McKay muttered as the drinks were brought. He looked at the saloon owner through half-lowered eyelids.

He knew the man by hearsay, and what he had heard was far from flattering. "Deac" Miller was supposed to be connected in some way with "La Vibora"—the "Snake." And that was McKay's present assignment—to get all the information possible about La Vibora's gang of border bandits and murderers.

Deac, which was short for "Deacon," got his name from his peculiar way of dressing. Except for a white "bald-faced" shirt, he was dressed in somber black. He certainly didn't look like a saloon keeper or gambler. His pale face was pleasantly gentle, and he had a way of piously rolling his eyes upward toward heaven.

The Ranger, however, was not deceived. Deac was a bad hombre.

"Haven't I seen yuh some place before, feller?" Deac asked softly. "In El Paso? Or was it in Sierra Blanca?"

"I don't think we've ever met," replied the Ranger, flipping away the end of his cigarette.

He noticed that the evil crew of Mexicans was edging closer to the table and his heartbeat quickened. Small chance he would have if they started anything! He was in the United States—a mile north of the Rio Grande—but as far as any help was concerned, he might just as well have been a hundred miles deep in Mexico. The Two Nations Saloon was far from any town or settlement.

"So yo're new to these parts, eh?" Deac questioned, sipping at his liquor

"Yeah, jist passin' through," yawned McKay with a calmness he didn't quite feel. He started to rise. "I reckon it's about time I was rattlin' my hocks out of here. I'll take a bottle o' tequila along with me."

"Sit down," Deac said smoothly. "You ain't goin' nowhar—Ranger!"

Clint McKay had risen halfway from his chair, when a pair of hands from behind seized his shoulders and pushed him back down in his seat. Before he could reach his holstered Colt, another hand grasped his right elbow in a powerful grip.

"I know what yo're coyotin' around yere fer, Ranger!" said Deac Miller raspingly, his eyes no longer gentle but glittering with ugly lights. "Yo're not goin' to leave the Two Nations alive!"

At that instant, just as McKay was about to make a hopeless fight for his life, the green-shuttered front doors of the saloon were whisked open. Into the room strode a tall, bronzed young hombre dressed in buckskins from head to foot.

His costume, touched with vivid color, included a wide sombrero of coffee shade, its brim turned up; and tall-heeled boots ornamented with the Lone Star emblem of Texas, worked in silver. Low on each thigh, was a holstered Colt .45 Peacemaker.

"Another one of 'em," thought McKay.

But Deac and his Mexican pards seemed to regard the newcomer as an intruder. There was a sizzling oath from the saloon keeper, and the others whirled on the man who had interrupted their business of doing for a Ranger.

"Go on out!" Deac rapped out curtly. "We ain't open fer business."

The two swarthy desperadoes who were holding McKay by the arms tightened their grip on him. The Ranger could smell the odor of their liquor-and-garlic-laden breaths.

Some one behind him clicked a gun hammer.

The newcomer, however, didn't seem anxious to leave. Instead, he sauntered forward at an easy, catlike stride. McKay noticed how erect he was, and the width of his shoulders in contrast to the slenderness of his waist where his gun belts, glittering with the brass of cartridges, slanted toward his lean hips.

"Let go that hombre," he said quietly in the drawling accents of a native Texan. "Tuhn him loose—pronto!"

"Yuh got ahold of the hot end of the iron, young feller!" Deac Miller snarled back at him. "I tell yuh we ain't open fer business, an'——"

"But *this* is open fo' business, sah!" flashed the buckskin-clad hombre, and with the quickness of magic, his right-side Peacemaker leaped into his hand. The whip-crack motion of his hand had been too quick for the eye to follow.

"Let him have it! Put windows in him!" yelped Deac wildly. "He can't git by——"

The roaring thunder of gun shots rattled the glasses on the bar and flickered the lamps. Bullets squalled, and a blanket of smoke unfolded.

McKay felt himself suddenly released. He heard screeches of pain, oaths in both Spanish and English. Those shots hadn't come from the weapons of Deac's brown pards, but from the gray-eyed newcomer, the American!

Jerking out his own gun, the Ranger tore himself away from the table with a backward spring.

He saw a Mexican rolling over and over across the floor, leaving a trail of scarlet behind him from a punctured shoulder. Another one yammered and dropped his gun, his arm dangling and useless.

"Come on—with me, amigo!" sang out the youth in buckskins, who was backing toward the door through the smoke of his own making. "Let's get out of heah!"

One of Deac's Mexicans yanked a long-bladed *cuchillo* from his ragged sash, and hurled it at the stranger with all his force.

The range was short, but the knife never found its mark. There was a whacking sound. The buckskin hombre had whirled up a chair as a shield, and the blade went quivering into solid wood. And then the Ranger's rescuer threw the chair at the desperado who had flung the knife. It smashed into his head and shoulders, sending him stunned and sprawling to the floor.

McKay's gun streaked flame and smoke, and another dark-skinned ruffian dropped. And this one was on the floor to stay, for the Ranger's bullet had chopped his heart.

Deac had jerked a "pepper-box" four-barreled pistol from an inside pocket of his black coat, but he had no chance to use it. Clint McKay and the mysterious hombre in buckskins leaped through the swinging doors into the darkness, leaving a room full of gun smoke behind them.

CHAPTER II.

THE SOLDIER OF MISFORTUNE.

IT was moonlight outside, and the surviving Mexican gunmen came swarming out of the Two Nations with guns going. Their bullets did no damage, however, for McKay and his unexpected friend gave their horses the hooks and galloped southward. The chaparral and mesquites whizzed past like flying ghosts.

McKay thought his own black cayuse Tar Baby was fast, but he had no little difficulty in keeping up with the buckskin rider's horse. It

was a big, extremely powerful animal, but had the graceful lines of a race horse. It was snow-white in color, and its mane and tail were like unraveled silk.

At the edge of the Rio Grande, a broad streak of silver in the moonlight, they slowed their pace and finally halted. There were no signs of any pursuit, and no more gunshots. The two young hombres looked at each other and laughed.

"Thet was a narrer squeak, believe yuh me!" chuckled the Ranger, as he gripped hands with the stranger. "They shore would've had me if it hadn't been fer you. I'm Clint McKay, o' the Rangers."

"And mah name is Kid Wolf, mah last name bein' fo' mah enemies only." The rider of the white cayuse smiled as he gripped hands with the Ranger. "I soht of figuahed yo' were an officah."

"Well, Kid, you reamed two of them scalawags, and I bedded one down fer keeps." Clint McKay grinned. "It's a good thing yuh was so quick with yore cutter. Thet draw of yores would have made a streak o' lightnin' hang fire. Whar are yuh bound fer?"

"Quién sabe? Blizzard and I," drawled "Kid" Wolf, running his fingers caressingly through his white horse's mane, "ah just a couple of tumbleweeds in a high wind—driftahs."

"A soldier of fortune, eh?" said the Ranger, as he licked a cigarette together.

"Rathah a soldiah of misfohtune," the Kid drawled.

"And yuh don't care much whar yuh drift to?" the Ranger laughed. "In thet case, why not come along with me? I'm goin' across the border on a plumb tough assignment. Ever hear of La Vibora, Kid?"

Although Kid Wolf was a native Texan, he was, as he had said, a wanderer with all the West as his stamping ground. He had not been back to the Rio country for more than a year. He shook his head. The name La Vibora was new to him.

"This Vibora hombre is the worst *bandido* on the Grande," Clint explained quickly. "I think those hombres back at thet drinkin' dive are members of his gang; thar's 'bout twenty men in his bunch, I've heard, includin' some Americans. Vibora's hide-out is somewhere on the chili side of the Rio. I'm goin' to look fer it. Comin' along?"

It was an adventure that Kid Wolf couldn't resist. He smiled, and his eyes glistened in the moonlight. Blizzard, too, seemed eager, and whickered, champing his bit.

"*Esta bien, amigo,*" the Kid agreed. "Let's ride!"

It was long after midnight, nearly morning, and the crisp air was pungent with the sweet aroma of sage. They crossed the wide, swift-running and shallow waters of the Rio Grande, and found themselves in the vast wilderness that was Chihuahua, with Sonora the most lawless State in old Mexico.

It didn't take Kid Wolf and the Ranger long to get acquainted, and before they had traveled stirrup to stirrup for five miles, they felt that they had always known each other. Clint McKay told things of La Vibora that made the Kid's nerves tingle.

The "Soldier of Misfortune," as Kid Wolf was known throughout the West, had earned the name that had been given him. Always a friend of the under dog, he was a believer in six-gun justice, and many a criminal had felt the sting of his own particular brand of law.

They swung toward the west, fol-

lowing the meanderings of a sandy arroyo in the general direction of a gaunt and forbidding range of notched mountains. All at once, the Kid was startled to hear a groan of pain from his friend.

"What's the mattah, *compadre*? Were yo' hurt back theah, Clint?" he asked, as the Ranger pulled up his bronc.

"No, dang it! It's my toothache," growled McKay. "I've had it three days, now, off and on. Makes me want to pry the lid off my can o' private cuss words. The medico at Paso give me somethin' fer it—laudanum. I better take a dose." He took a tiny vial from his pocket and swallowed a few drops.

They pressed on. Already the eastern sky was streaked with the first colors of the dawn, and the desert was becoming gray. They were riding slowly, now, saving their horses as much as possible.

Suddenly Kid Wolf reined in Blizzard with an exclamation. Something glittered brightly on the sand just ahead of him—a Mexican silver dollar, a peso. And a little farther on was another.

"Looks like we've picked up a trail of money, Kid," cried McKay when he saw the coins. "Look yonder! Thar's more of 'em!"

Dismounting, they eyed the ground carefully. In a short time, they had picked up nearly a dozen of the Mexican pesos. They also discovered mule tracks and the prints of horseshoes pointing east. They seemed to be very recent.

"This shore beats all!" grunted the Ranger, scratching his head. "Looks like somebody's been along this a way with a sack o' Mex pesos, and thar was a leak in the sack."

"Theah were a couple of pack mules, and they were both carryin' heavy loads, judgin' from the depth of these tracks," observed the Kid as he examined the prints again. "Who carries mule loads of silvah dinero, amigo?"

"*Bandidos*, prob'ly," snapped McKay, "but thar's chances that it might be a Mex trader on the way to the border to buy American goods from the smugglers. A lot o' thet goes on."

"Well, shall we follow the peso trail to wheah it's goin', or trace it back to wheah it stahted from?" asked Kid Wolf.

"Suppose we toss up one of these pesos to decide," said the Ranger. "Heads, we follow the silver trail; and tails, we ride on west."

The peso was flipped, and came down "tails." The two friends swung aboard their broncs again and trotted along the arroyo bank, back-trailing the faint impressions made by the mules and horses. Now and then, they caught the glint of a silver peso in the gray light of the early morning.

They had just rounded a sharp, mesquite-masked bend, when the report of a rifle rang out, and a bullet zipped viciously between them.

CHAPTER III.

AT DON ANTONIO'S HACIENDA.

RANGER McKAY swore scorchingly and reached for his Colt .44, eyes blazing with anger.

Kid Wolf, however, had spotted the hombre who had fired the shot. A puff of blue smoke hung over a dwarf oak about a hundred yards ahead. The rifleman was a Mexican youngster, probably no more than fifteen, dressed in gay Spanish costume.

"Wait a minute, Clint," urged the Soldier of Misfortune, and then he lifted his voice in a shout. "Don't

shoot, *muchacho!*" he called. "*Que pasa?* We are friends!"

"How do yuh know we are?" McKay protested.

But Kid Wolf knew that they had come to the starting point of that trail of Mexican dollars. Near the youngster, another hombre was stretched out on the ground, and at a little distance, another man was sprawled—dead, judging from the cramped stiffness of his body. At the middle of the arroyo bottom were the carcasses of two horses, around which buzzards were circling boldly.

With their right hands lifted in the signal of peace, Kid Wolf and McKay rode slowly toward the Mexican youth, who was still fingering his rifle uncertainly. As they came closer to him, he all at once threw his weapon down.

"*Perdone usted.* I am sorry, señores," he said. "I thought you were men of the *bandido* gang come back to finish us. Last night, they robbed us at this place, wounded my father badly, and took the silver pesos with which we were to buy cattle at San Felipe. Can you help —my father?"

"Don't worry, kid." McKay grinned. "We may be kind of away from our legal stampin' grounds, but we're representin' U. S. law. Was it La Vibora?"

The anxious young Mexican nodded. There had been five or six men in the gang at least, he said, and he thought that some of them were Americans. His name, he explained, was Julio Lopez, and his father was Don Antonio Lopez, the owner of a large hacienda or ranch a few miles farther west. The man who had been slain was a servant of the family.

"I had no way of moving my father, and hated to leave him," Julio said brokenly. "Will he live?"

The Kid examined Don Antonio's wounds, one of which was in the shoulder, the other in his leg. Although the ranchman was weak from shock, neither hurt was serious, and after binding up his injuries as best he could, he and Clint lifted the wounded man onto the Ranger's cayuse.

Don Antonia was a handsome man of fifty, with hair and mustache still jet-black. He was full of gratitude, and murmured his thanks over and over again:

"*Gracias, caballeros.* You are very kind. My house is but a little way from here, and if you would be so good as to take me——"

"Certainly, sah." The Kid smiled. "We'll be glad to see yo' home safe. Can yo' hold on?"

They started slowly toward Don Antonio's rancho, McKay and the Texan walking alongside the two burdened horses. The body of the dead peon had been put upon Blizzard, along with Julio.

"My son tells me that you are *Americano policia,*" said the ranch owner. "Of that I am glad. The Mexican law has been able to do nothing with La Vibora and his ladrones (thieves). I do not mind so much losing my six thousand pesos, but my faithful servant was killed. But ahead, amigos, is my *casa.* You must remain with me as my guests."

"We got other things to do, Don Antone," McKay growled. "But we'll see thet yo're made comfortable afore we git on the trail o' them murderers."

Don Antonio's house was a large adobe, of one story and with a flat roof. It formed the south side of a rectangular patio, the other sides of which were thick walls eight or

nine feet high. On the east was a gate of heavy wrought iron, standing open.

They rode through, finding themselves in the patio itself, an open space paved with neatly swept flagstone. Around the inner side of the walls were the little houses of the peons and servants, and rows of stalls for riding horses. A border of bright flowers grew alongside the house itself, and water was even running in a little fountain.

For a while, there was a great deal of excitement and many lamentations from the household. Peons came running from their work, wringing their hands and wailing. When they learned that the *patron* hadn't been seriously wounded, they quieted down a little and were able to help the wounded Spaniard into the house.

"These folks is plenty high-class Mexicans. They ain't like them oily bean eaters we had the ruckus with last night," the Ranger whispered into the Kid's ear.

Don Antonio insisted that Kid Wolf and the Ranger should stay for breakfast, at least, as his guests. The don and his family were so pressing with their hospitality that they had to accept.

Young Julio had a sister, Concha Teresa, a beautiful young girl of about sixteen. She was as shy as a deer, and had the largest eyes that the Kid had ever seen in so flower-like a face. He chuckled to himself when he saw how red, and then how pale, Clint McKay's cheeks became at the sight of her.

The mother was dead, and a sister of Don Antonio's, Dona Lolita, was in charge of the household. She was a large and somewhat stern old lady of fifty and was dressed in somber black.

The breakfast was a tasty one, but as soon as they could politely do so, the two Americans rose from the table and said good-by to Don Antonio and his family.

"We're goin' to try and find them bandits' hide-away, señor," blurted McKay, stealing a sidelong glance at Concha. "And we'll do what we can to recover the dinero they stole from yuh."

The don shrugged expressive shoulders. "For the money I do not so much care, caballeros," he said. "Nor for my wounds. For a long time, though, those *diablos* have been robbing and killing on both sides of the line. I wish you much success. *Hasta la vista!* May we see you again soon!"

"*Mil gracias.*" The Kid smiled as he and Clint McKay strode toward their horses. "*Hasta la vista!*"

Julio shouted a good-by, and little Concha waved to them, the latter almost causing the Ranger to miss his stirrup.

As they drew away from the hacienda, the Kid noticed that a mass of churning black clouds was rolling up from the western sky line. The air was close and oppressive; not a mesquite twig moved in the sultry air, and the white dust, stirred by the hoofs of Blizzard and Tar Baby, seemed to hang suspended behind them.

"We'd bettah make time in follow'in' that peso trail, Clint. It's goin' to rain and covah the sign," said the buckskin-clad Texan, and then, as the strangely silent Ranger made no reply, he continued: "She *did* have pretty eyes, didn't she, amigo?"

"Yes, she shore——" began McKay, and then his homely face flushed. "Golly, Kid!" He grinned sheepishly. "That señorita even made me forgit my toothache. But

shucks! I must be loco. No gal's goin' to git a rope on *me*. Let's forgit it."

They found the peso trail again without difficulty, and for several miles, they hadn't much trouble in following it. A silver coin would appear every twenty or thirty yards to lead them on. After a couple of miles, however, they saw no more of them.

"They found the rip in the bag and fixed it," growled the Ranger. "Well, we can still foller their tracks. They've cut off to them mountains to the south, looks like."

Shortly after noon, the rain came in a drenching torrent. As in most desert regions, water fell rarely in Chihuahua, but splashed down with a vengeance when it *did* come. When the brief storm struck, they were in a rocky foothill country, and they managed to shelter themselves under an overhanging bluff.

"That shore washed out the trail!" the Ranger snarled disgustedly when the downpour was over. "I reckon we might as well keep headed toward them mountains, though. We might stumble onto somethin'."

The country became grimmer and more forbidding at each passing mile. The skies had cleared, but there was a haze about the burning sun, and heat waves began to flicker blindingly, causing the desolate mountains to waver and twist maddeningly in the glare. They were glad when the sun finally slid sullenly below the jagged horizon.

"Our hosses need rest, Kid," grunted McKay. "I reckon we'd better be makin' camp purty soon."

At twilight, they found a likely place to unroll their soogans, discovering a little stream of acrid but drinkable water in a narrow canyon.

"The hosses will have to go kind o' short to-night," said McKay. "Thar ain't enough grass yereabouts to wad a shotgun."

Both the Ranger and the Kid had some provisions along, and by pooling their supplies, they managed to get an appetizing supper together. Then they lighted cigarettes and talked, watching the stars come out, one by one, in the velvet-blue sky overhead. Their little fire died down to a ruddy glow in the gathering darkness.

"We'll do plenty explorin' mañana," yawned the Ranger. "I got a hunch, Kid, thet the Vibora gang's hide-out is somewhar near yere. Well, I think I'll git some shut-eye. Yuh'd better turn in, too. I don't think thar's any use in standin' watch to-night. I'm a light sleeper, and this danged tooth o' mine will make me jumpier than ever."

Clint McKay was soon asleep, but Kid Wolf lingered over another cigarette. The moon wasn't up yet, but he could see Blizzard moving quietly about in the starshine. Tar Baby had been picketed, but the Kid never had to take such precautions with his big white cayuse, as it never strayed far from his side and was always within hearing of his whistle.

Kid Wolf, after months of wandering, was back in the country he loved; a little south of it, to be sure, but the rolling Rio wasn't many miles away. In the far distance, he heard coyotes—"desert lawyers"—talking mournfully. The Kid began to whistle his favorite tune, and finally he found words for it:

"Oh, I'm glad to be on the Rio Grande, the Rio!
Way south of San Antone,
Wheah the longhohns bawl, and the eagles squall,
And the diamond rattlahs drone!"

The Ranger stirred uneasily in his sleep. At first, the Kid thought it might be his aching tooth that had disturbed him, but when McKay murmured, "Concha," he knew what was the matter.

"Son," the Kid chuckled, "yo' sho' have got it bad."

CHAPTER IV.

IN LA VIBORA'S CAVE.

KID WOLF hadn't been asleep more than a few hours, at most, when he awoke with the sickening realization that something was terribly wrong. Cold metal was being pressed tightly against his ear, and a hand was passing along his body.

He fumbled toward the Colt Peacemakers he had placed alongside him within easy reach. He was still half asleep, and he wasn't sure that it wasn't just a bad dream. But his guns weren't there! He heard a stifled cry from Clint McKay, the sound of scuffling and heavy breathing.

The Kid tried to struggle to his feet, but was swarmed under. Lashing out with both fists, he felt his knuckles smash against some one's hairy face, and then a heavy gun barrel came down forcibly on his temple. Sparks danced before his eyes; he saw stars and floating pinwheels, then blackness. He'd been knocked senseless.

When the Soldier of Misfortune finally recovered consciousness, he was on his own cayuse, his hands bound tightly to his saddle horn. Blizzard was picking his way carefully, and the Kid heard his uneasy snorting above the rattle of stones.

Dimly, everything came back to him—the struggle at the dead camp fire, the yell from McKay, and then the knock-out blow. He lifted his drooping head and looked about him.

He was in the midst of a party of eight or nine horsemen, and they seemed to be ascending a steep and narrow ravine. Glancing up at the stars, the Kid estimated that it was hardly more than eleven o'clock. As the Big Dipper was behind them, they were going south.

"Kid, are yuh all right?"

It was Clint McKay. He was riding alongside the Texan, likewise tied to his saddle. The moon was up, and the Kid saw the anger in the Ranger's tense face.

"We was careless," he snarled. "They got us good and plenty. I reckon I ain't as light a sleeper as I thought I was. I'll never trust another toothache!"

"Keep yo' back up, *compadre*," said the Kid.

"Our lives ain't worth a barrel o' shucks in this gang, pard," whispered the Ranger hoarsely.

Kid Wolf tugged at his bonds, but his efforts were unavailing. Looking around, he eyed their captors attentively. About half the band were Mexicans, the others being Americans, apparently, border ruffians of the most brutal type.

"Awake, aire yuh?" rasped a whiskered desperado on the kid's left. "Waal, yere's payin' yuh fer the punch in the face yuh gave me!"

The Kid dodged, but was unable to avoid the slashing impact of the hard rawhide lashes. Again and again, the bandit struck, and the Kid took the blows on his neck and cheek to protect his eyes. Laughter went up from the others.

"*Ya, ya!*" hooted one of the Mexicans. "Geeve it to heem, Snider!" And Kid Wolf recognized him as one of the desperadoes who had stopped one of his bullets in the saloon mix-

up. His arm was in a bandanna-handkerchief sling.

The ravine they were following took an abrupt turn, and the party began climbing a narrow ledge along one of its steep walls, riding slowly in single file. The trail soon became extremely dangerous, as the slightest misstep would send horse and rider hurtling to the rocks, a hundred feet below.

After a quarter of a mile, the ledge widened out and became a broad table. Here the bandits dismounted. The two prisoners were released from their bonds and taken from their broncs.

"Keep 'em covered, men," rasped the hombre called Snider. "We'll put away the hosses."

The broncs, Blizzard and Tar Baby included, were driven into a good-sized rope corral that occupied most of the ledge. Then the two captives were marched forward, alongside the cliff.

"La Vibora is allus glad to see Rangers," chortled one of the Americans.

"I'm a Ranger," snapped McKay, "but my pard ain't. Why don't yuh let him go? I ain't carin', myself, but——"

"He's goin' to git jist what you git, Ranger," was the answering sneer.

Coming to what seemed to be a jumping-off place, and the end of the ledge, the bandits paused. One of them whistled in a peculiar manner.

A gleam of light appeared from what seemed to be a point in the solid rock. The yellow chink of lamplight widened as a large blanket was drawn aside, disclosing the mouth of a cave. The entrance was also disguised by a clump of cedar that grew in front of it.

"Hello, Deac," Snider chuckled. "We got a surprise fer yuh. Who do yuh reckon we've got with us?"

Framed in the glare of the lamp, was Deac Miller, the somberly dressed proprietor of the Two Nations. He gave an exclamation of surprise as McKay and the Kid were brought in, and then his evil face was twisted by a smile of unholy joy.

"If it ain't the Ranger and the buckskin jasper!" he gloated. "Right nice of yuh to call. Come right on in and make yoreselves at home!"

The cave was a great hollow that had been worn in the cliff by the wind and rain of countless ages. Although the entrance was hardly higher than a man's head, the interior of the cavern rose to a height of fifteen feet. It was almost circular, about seventy feet across.

La Vibora had furnished it very comfortably, too. Indian and Mexican rugs covered the stone floor, and there were skins of wild animals to serve as beds. In a corner was a charcoal stove, and there were crude chairs and a table. Loot of all kinds was stacked everywhere, and it included an assortment of gold and silver plate—rich vessels evidently stolen from churches.

There were about a dozen more bandits in the big cavern, all Mexicans and breeds, and some of Indian descent. Four or five were playing cards at the table, and others were drinking or cleaning guns. They all stared sullenly at the sight of the two gringo prisoners. The Kid had seen many a tough gang, but never an uglier one than this.

He didn't need to be told which hombre was La Vibora. The leader came striding forward, a giant of a man, wide-shouldered and muscular. He wore an unbuttoned shirt of vivid-blue silk, slashed pantaloons of a velvet material, and huge sil-

ver spurs. His conical-crowned sombrero was heavily weighted with gold embroidery, and from his red sash protruded the carved ivory handle of a long *cuchillo*. At his huge thigh was a Colt six-gun in an elaborately carved holster.

Vibora had one of the most repulsive faces the Kid ever remembered seeing. His eyes were like gimlets, half hidden by shaggy brows. His nose had been broken and had mended crookedly. The mouth was as straight and thin as a knife slash.

"So *these* are the Americanos you told me of," he laughed, showing a line of snaggly teeth.

"Yep." Snider grinned. "We caught 'em by accident on the way back from our look-see at Don Tony's rancho."

"This one's a Texas Ranger," sneered Deac, jerking his thumb toward McKay. "I dunno who this un is, but——"

"What ees your name?" Vibora snarled at the Soldier of Misfortune.

"Wolf, sah," said the Kid steadily, his gray-blue eyes probing the bandit leader's black ones.

"If you are not a Ranger, Lobo," rasped Vibora, "why do you steek yourself into my beesiness?"

"*Mah* business, sah," flashed the Soldier of Misfortune, "is to bring thieves and killahs like yo' to justice!"

Vibora's evil face turned livid with fury, and he swore sulphurously in Spanish. The others grinned pityingly. They had expected the Kid to grovel for mercy. This Americano would suffer for his bold words!

Vibora glanced toward the charcoal stove at the end of the cave. Then he, too, laughed.

"We weel see to your case later, Señor Lobo," he said mockingly. "Well, Snider, what you find out at Don Antonio's, eh?"

Kid Wolf and the Ranger were pushed down onto a pile of skins at the side of the room, while Vibora questioned the scouting party.

"The don didn't die; we found out thet much," growled Snider, called "Slippery" by most of his companions. "They don't seem to be expectin' any raid. Easy pickin's, I'd say."

Slippery Snider was a burly hombre of forty. He was a "gun tipper"—that is, his open-bottomed holster was fastened to his belt by a rivet, so that he could tip up his gun and shoot without pulling his weapon from the leather. This marked him as a dangerous man in an encounter.

Kid Wolf, while listening to what was being said, noted the others carefully, and the names that they called one another.

Besides Snider and Deac, there were three other Americans in this murder gang of about twenty. Clay Wilson was a bony, slant-eyed hombre with a skull-like face and protruding Adam's apple. Van Johnson and Monte Gray were ugly specimens, gunmen through and through, without soul or conscience. Johnson's face was marked with a puckered zigzag scar.

"I tell yuh, Vibora," Deac, who seemed to be second in command, was protesting, "thet dinero we got wasn't enough! What's a measly six thousand pesos? The don's rich. He's got plenty o' gold."

"Yeah, it ain't midnight yit," chimed in Slippery Snider, running impatient fingers through his tangled beard. "Why not tackle the rancho—to-night?"

La Vibora's eyes glistened greedily, and he thought it over for a minute.

"*Bueno!*" he agreed. "We weel make raid. Pablo! Diego! Make ready the horses, pronto!"

Deac Miller turned toward the two prisoners, slowly sliding his Colt from its holster. On his evil face was a deadly smile.

"And I'll finish *this* job," he said gloatingly. "Jist watch me curl 'em up! Yere's whar I let some fresh air into their skulls!"

"*Alto ahí!*" cried Vibora quickly. "Don't shoot them; that ees too easy way for La Vibora's enemies to die. I weel take care of them myself when we return. Pedro! Carlos and Pepe! You weel stay here and guard these hombres. Watch well!"

The three Mexicans who had been detailed as guards nodded understandingly. One of them squatted a few yards from the captives, put his cocked six-gun on the ground beside him and rolled a corn-shuck cigarette. The other pair slumped into chairs at the table.

While the broncs were being made ready, the gang inspected guns and equipment, helping themselves to fresh cartridges from pasteboard boxes that littered the room. La Vibora drew on a vest trimmed with gold thread and buttons of silver coins.

"Good-by, Wolf, and Mr. Ranger Man!" sang out Deac as the gang trooped toward the cave entrance. "We'll be seein' yuh right soon. Know what the Snake Brand is? Well, when we come back, Vibora is goin' to put it all over yuh!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WINE JUG.

WHEN the gang had gone, and the clip-clops of their horses' hoofs had died away, Kid Wolf and Clint McKay exchanged determined glances. Something would have to be done, and soon. Not only were their own lives at stake, but the safety of Don Antone's family. They would have little chance against seventeen heavily armed bandits, and would be butchered without mercy.

"I'm goin' to rush these Mexes, Kid," whispered the Ranger between set teeth. "It's the only thing to do, and we might as well die fightin' as to be tortured later."

"Wait a while, amigo," the Kid breathed softly.

He knew that they would have no chance at all in a rush at the Mexican trio. They were keeping a respectful distance away, and would have plenty of time to shoot before the Americans could reach them. They were watchful and alert, too. No, a rush would be instantly fatal.

Pepe, the desperado who was crouched across from them, seemed to read McKay's mind. He flipped his cigarette away and laughed noiselessly.

"*Tontos!*" he jeered. "Fools! Eef you try to get away, or eef you move from there, I weel put bullets in you queeck."

Kid Wolf, sitting next to McKay with his back to the wall, was doing some swift thinking. He wasn't entirely disarmed, by any means. In their search, the bandits hadn't found the big Texas bowie knife that he always carried in a concealed sheath sewed inside the collar of his buckskin shirt.

That bowie had been the Kid's "big casino" in many a desperate game of life and death. He could throw it like a bolt of lightning.

But he saw very well that it could be used only as a last resort. At the finish, he might take some one to death with him, but the bowie could accomplish little else. If he

succeeded in killing one of the guards, the other two would shoot to kill, instantly.

"Kid, I can't stand this much longer," muttered McKay, wiping the cold sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "You make a rush fer the door while I rush 'em."

The two hombres at the table heard McKay's whisper, and though they did not understand what was said, they glared at the prisoners.

"No chance, Clint," the Texan murmured. "We'll have to wait fo' a break."

Minutes passed, minutes that seemed like dreary hours. The cave was hot and oppressive from the fumes of the lamp and the pungent smoke of the guards' *cigarillos*.

Finally, one of the bandits rose, went to the other end of the cavern and returned with a wicker-covered gallon jug. It was full of red wine. All three drank from it in turn, smacking their lips with satisfaction.

"Do you gringo fools want a dreenk of *vino?*" jeered one of the desperadoes. "Eet will make you brave, and you will not shake so mooch when La Vibora comes back."

The others laughed, and joked in their native tongue. The Ranger's face darkened with fury.

"Yuh crawlly, low-down bean eaters kin go plumb tuh——" he began acidly, but the Kid gave him a nudge.

"Slip me yo' toothache medicine," he breathed, "and don't let 'em see yo'." Then the Kid addressed their captors in a polite tone: "We would like a little sip of yo' wine, if yo' don't mind, gentlemen."

Being called "gentlemen" flattered the swarthy ruffians. Swaggering with conceit, one of them came toward the prisoners with the jug. At the same time, McKay slipped Kid Wolf the vial containing the laudanum. A twinkle had come into the Ranger's eyes; he understood what the Kid had in mind.

Tipping up the wine jug, Kid Wolf pretended to drink from it. Instead, he emptied into the sour-smelling wine, the contents of the uncorked medicine bottle. Then he passed the jug over to McKay, who also made a pretense of sipping the wine.

"*Gracias,* gentlemen," drawled the Kid, as the container was handed back to the Mexican. "We do not drink much, señores, because it addles ouh heads. We've heard it said that Mexicans ah great wine drinkahs."

"*Pouf!*" snorted one of the guards. "Weeth us, *vino* is no more strong than water. Look! We dreenk the rest of eet and theenk no more about it."

To show their prowess at wine drinking, all three took turns at the demijohn until it was empty. Then they lighted up cigarettes, keeping a careful watch on their captives.

"Will it work, Kid? It's awful strong stuff," McKay whispered.

"Let's hope so, amigo."

For a while, the three desperadoes kept up a lively conversation in oath-sprinkled Spanish. Gradually, however, their liveliness flagged. The talk died down. One of the bandits, idly riffling a deck of cards, yawned dully. Another soon went out for a breath of fresh air, and when he returned, there was a queer, dilated look about his eyes.

The powerful drug was at work, and once it had begun to take effect, its work was quick and certain. One of the ruffians at the table dropped his head on his arms and began to snore.

"Pedro sleeps," said the one called Carlos, gaping widely. "Lucky dog. I am sleepy, too, but you and I, Pepe, must keep our eyes open tonight."

But within three minutes, Carlos was sleeping, too, his head thrown back and his eyes tightly closed. Pepe sprang up with an alarmed oath, shaking him by the shoulder.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded in Spanish. "*Que pasa?* You must not sleep." Pepe's words became slower, as if his tongue was thick. "You—can't sleep, Carlos. The prisoners—the gringos——"

Pepe blinked, swayed on his feet, then straightened with a frightened start. He lifted his gun, with a scowl, took three steps toward McKay and the Kid, and then suddenly collapsed. Rolling over on a pile of skins, he soon was outsnoring his two companions.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE HACIENDA.

THANKS to the strong narcotic, Pepe, Carlos, and Pedro were dead to the world, and would remain so for many hours.

Getting to his feet, Clint McKay executed a jig-time two-step, then made a dash for the stack of guns at the other side of the cavern.

"Yuh got plenty wrinkles in yore horns, Kid," he jubilated. "I'd never have thought of thet! Now to git our hosses and ride pronto fer Don Antone's ranch."

The Ranger picked out a gun to his liking and helped himself to cartridges. The Kid found a pair of likely-looking Colt .45s among the pile of extra weapons, and slid them into his empty holsters.

"Pleasant dreams, yuh low-down bean eaters!" yelped McKay as he and the Kid dashed for the cave entrance.

Their horses were awaiting them in the corral, along with several others, and welcomed their masters with impatient whinnies. A few minutes later, McKay and Kid Wolf were halfway down the cliff trail.

"I ain't got any idea whar we are. Have you, pard?" the Ranger growled. "It's too danged dark to see many landmarks."

"We ah about due south of wheah we camped," the Kid estimated. "And the moon will be brightah after we ah out of this ravine."

Reaching the end of the canyon, they hammered at a gallop out into open country, headed north. The raiders had considerably more than an hour's start, and there was every need of haste. Even now, it might be too late.

"I hope the don takes precautions at night," panted McKay as they thundered along. "If that wall gate happened to be unlocked, Kid——"

"It's pretty strong, and if it's fastened, Don Antonio and his men will probably be able to hold off La Vibora fo' a while, at least," was the Kid's opinion.

Several miles went flying under the swift hoofs of the white horse and the black. They passed close to the place where they had been captured, and pounded on, more sure, now, of their way. Their eyes had become more accustomed to the gloom, and by aid of the moon and stars, they were able to see for some distance ahead.

Charging through the mesquite, they veered off to the west, toward Don Antonio's ranch. Tar Baby again was having trouble in keeping up with Blizzard's furious pace—and Tar Baby was fast! Wind howled and chanted in the ears of

the two pardners. In tune with it, the Kid sang a stanza of his favorite song:

"Theah's happy trails on the Rio Grande,
the Rio!
And trails full of dangah, too,
Wheah guns explode, and change the road
To death's dahk avenue!"

For another mile, they raced along, cutting across country as straight as possible. Suddenly McKay pulled in his cayuse and yelled for the Kid to do likewise.

"Listen! Hear it?"

"Gun shots." The Kid nodded. "That means they ah still holdin' out! Come on!"

Approaching the ranch cautiously from the south, they finally made out the dark bulk of the walled rancho headquarters and red winks of gun flame. Most of the bandits seemed to be massed close to the north wall, where it was a trifle lower; but some were shooting through the closed grille of the gate. La Vibora hadn't yet been able to force an entrance. Kid Wolf and McKay breathed easier.

"We've got to get in theah, some way, and help them," the Kid muttered. "Let's try the west side. Theah's a little hill risin' neah the wall. We don't dare try to crawl ovah that wall, I reckon. We'd be shot in mistake fo' the bandits."

It lacked only an hour until dawn, and if they were to get inside under cover of darkness, they would have to work fast. Hidden in the brush of a little hillock, they made plans.

The gang had made several attempts to mount the wall, but had been unsuccessful. Two or three had been killed in trying to crawl over, and now there was a lull in the battle.

"I hope they're all right inside," muttered McKay gloomily.

"Oh, I think Concha is safe, pahdnah," said the Kid gently.

They had dismounted from their broncs, as they were likely to be seen, especially Blizzard, with his white coat. They were very cautious, for the surrounding *bandidos* might stumble upon them at any moment. Their position was such an advantageous one, it was a wonder that La Vibora hadn't posted men there.

"I think I could throw a rock through the window of the house," whispered Kid Wolf.

"What good would thet do?"

"Got a pencil?" the Kid asked, taking a cigarette paper from his pocket.

"Yes, but——"

The Ranger handed his friend a stub of pencil.

The Kid took it and scrawled, as best he could in the darkness, the following message on the brown oblong of paper:

In 5 minutes open the gate. We're riding in. KID AND MCKAY.

"I'm just hopin' they won't think it's some kind of trap," muttered the Soldier of Misfortune, as he tied the message to a two-pound stone with a strip torn from his neckerchief. "Get ready to jump on yo' bronc, Clint. We ah makin' fo' the gate. Heads up!"

He hurled the rock—a difficult feat, at best, for it had to arch over the thick wall and go through the glass of the window beyond. And he missed! The rock failed of its target by a good three feet.

"Well, I got the range, anyway," he said grimly, as he began laboriously to scrawl another note.

"Thar's two-three hombres jist outside the gate, Kid, a-shootin' through it," growled the Ranger.

"We'll have to drop 'em on the way in." The Kid nodded. "Shh! Heah's somebody——"

A Mexican in a straw sombrero had loomed into view, only a few yards from them. He had a carbine, and he began shooting at the very window that Kid Wolf had tried to get his message through. He hadn't noticed the two Americans.

"I'll git him," McKay breathed.

He drew his heavy Colt and tiptoed stealthily toward the swarthy rifleman, drawing closer, foot by foot. He was only six yards from him—now three—two——

Whack!

The desperado whirled suddenly—just in time to get a terrific blow on the head from the Ranger's Colt. He fell without a cry.

"I guess I must've busted his head," muttered McKay as he came slipping back. "Anyhow, thar's more hair stuck to my gun than thar is on his conk. Try thet rock stunt again, Kid."

This time, Kid Wolf was successful. The stone, with the cigarette paper attached, sailed neatly over the wall and crashed through the window.

"Now," said the Kid, running toward his big cayuse, "get ready to rush fo' the gate, Clint!"

The big gate, of twisted bars of wrought iron, was on the east side of the wall, and they edged their horses as close to it as possible without being seen by the raiders. Several minutes passed with breathtaking slowness.

"Do yuh reckon none of 'em can read English?" began McKay, when the gate suddenly swung inward.

"Let's go!" sang out the Soldier of Misfortune, and the two horses lunged forward as if released from a catapult.

Two serape-clad figures leaped from the shadows with amazed yells and tried to block them away from the opening. One of them tried to seize Blizzard by the bridle, and the other began shooting wildly.

The guns of the two Americans roared, flashing death and destruction. One of the bandits crumpled with two bullets through his midriff and fell under Blizzard's swift-beating hoofs. The other—an Indian half-breed—yelled out hideously, swayed, and went down with one of McKay's slugs through his heart.

The white horse and the black plunged through the opened gate, which clanged sharply behind them. They had made it! Don Antonio had two fighters now who could give an account of themselves!

CHAPTER VII.

TRAGEDY.

"*VIVA!*" cried Julio, for it was he who had taken the risk of throwing open the gate. "It was good of you to come, amigos! We will beat them now! Come! First, I will help you with your horses."

"*Que tal?*" (How are things going?)" asked Kid Wolf, as they dismounted in the concealing shadow of the wall.

"*Tal cual* (Just fair)," said Julio breathlessly. "The shooting began only half an hour since. Luckily, the lock on the gate is very strong, and they seem to have nothing with which to batter down the gate. One of the peons has been wounded a little."

"And the señorita—yore sister?" the Ranger demanded.

"All are well," said the young Spaniard. "We must get to the house quickly, amigos."

Blizzard and Tar Baby were turned into the safest of the stalls that bordered the inside of the wall,

and the Americans made a dash for the house with Julio.

By this time, several of the gang had thought to climb the little hillock where McKay and the Kid had been. They opened a hot fire, but although some of the bullets came close, the three reached the house in safety.

Inside, they found three anxious-faced peons giving battle. One was armed with an ancient cap-and-ball six-gun, and another only with a smooth-bore musket. Don Antonio, who was defending his home in spite of his painful wounds, had a rifle

All raised a welcoming *"Viva!"* at the arrival of Kid Wolf and McKay. The old rancher embraced them both.

"My sons!" he said. "You have come to save us!"

"Or to die with yo', sah," said the Kid warmly.

Only a feeble candle illumined the room, as they hadn't dared light a lamp for fear of making targets of themselves. It was already becoming light outside, however, and the eastern sky was flushing pink. It was morning.

Concha and Dona Lolita came from another room to bid the newcomers welcome. Don Antonio had thought they would be safer there.

McKay blushed to the roots of his hair at the sight of the little Spanish girl, and for some time after she had returned to the other apartment, he walked around in a half daze.

The large room where the men had posted themselves was so built that it commanded a view of the three walls. The door opened into the closed patio. There were no loopholes, unfortunately, and the walls were too thick for them to make any. The windows made good but dangerous vantage points to shoot through.

"How many are there in La Vibora's gang?" asked Don Antonio, after he had listened in astonishment to the story of the Americans' night adventure. "We have accounted, I think, for two of them."

"And we sent three more up the flume." The Ranger grinned. "I reckon thar's a dozen of them cutthroats out yonder. We'll cut 'em down some!"

The cutting-down, however, began to work out the other way. Three or four of the raiders had posted themselves on the hillside just west of the house, and opened up a scorching fire, raking the room with lead. One of the peons, already wounded, sank to the floor. He had been hit in the neck, just as he was about to shoot. He was dead before any one could lift him up.

As it was now daylight, the gang gave up trying to climb over the walls. For a long time, there was a lull in the siege; the shooting stopped altogether.

"I wonder what they're up to now," McKay growled. "I don't like the looks o' this. Them highliners is up to some kind of devilment, thet's shore."

The shooting from the hill began again, but was spasmodic and irregular. One bullet barely skimmed the top of McKay's head, knocking his hat down over one ear.

"Whew!" He grinned. "Thet blue whistler nearly combed my hair fer me."

His gun roared in reply, and a yell went up from the mesquites on the hillside. Down came a Mexican breed, rolling over and over, leaving a mottled trail of scarlet behind him.

There was another long spell of

quiet, and then, with nerve-racking suddenness, a tremendous roar. The ground shook, the house swayed, and the windows that hadn't already been broken out by bullets fell in fragments.

"What in blazes——" yelled McKay.

"The wall—on the north there! Look!" gasped Julio.

For a few moments, they could see little because of the great cloud of dense yellow dust that had filled the patio. Then they made out a big hole in the wall. The bandits had exploded a big charge of blasting powder and made a break in it. Already they were swarming through! Four or five men were in the patio, and more were coming.

The guns of the defenders roared, and one desperado—the hombre called Van Johnson—lurched and fell. He was the first white member of the raider band to go down. The others, however, gained the shelter of the horse stalls and the tiny native huts that were built on the inner side of the walls. And now, from many different points, they opened a peppering fire.

There was a cry from Clint McKay. His black cayuse Tar Baby had broken out of its stall. Crazed by the terrible din of the blast, and the deafening clatter of guns that had followed it, the animal began racing around the inclosure in a panic. And one of the bandits' shots killed it. Shot through the head, Tar Baby thrashed for a moment and lay still.

With a yell of rage, the Ranger began shooting as fast as he could thumb the hammer of his Colt. His face had hardened into a mask of stone.

"No more beans in my wheel," he muttered as he emptied his gun. "Got more ca'tridges, Kid?"

Shoving more slugs into the cylinder of his steaming six-gun, he sent shot after shot zipping into the patio. Kid Wolf, as angered as McKay at the killing of the horse, also raked the courtyard with lead. A red-sashed Mexican lurched from behind one of the huts, reeled halfway across the plaza, and fell lifeless into the fountain, clouding the water with crimson.

The gang evened it, though, in a moment. Ramon, one of the don's faithful peons, staggered away from a window and dropped heavily.

The raiders, some of whom were armed with rifles and carbines, were making a desperate effort now to wipe out their intended victims. They poured volley after volley into the house through every window. The thick adobe walls stopped many bullets, but the massive door soon resembled a sieve.

Just after the killing of Ramon, the door to the other apartment opened, and Dona Lolita came running in, her face tear-wet and her eyes full of tragedy and grief.

"Concha!" she wailed, wringing her hands piteously. "She has been hurt! She will not speak!"

With exclamations of horror, Don Antonio and his son dashed into the other room, followed by the weeping Lolita.

Clint McKay made a strangling sound in his throat. His face had turned a livid hue, and his lips were peeled back from his white teeth.

"Go with 'em, Clint," said the Kid softly, "I'll stand 'em off until yo' get back."

The Ranger didn't remain long in the room beyond. He came out, walking straight and erect, his face wooden, his eyes dull and expressionless. He did not look at the Kid as he strode past him, but his lips moved jerkily.

"She's dead," he whispered.

And then, before Kid Wolf could stop him, he kicked the door open and walked out into the patio, in the face of all those guns.

CHAPTER VIII.

VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

THERE was something magnificent and awe-inspiring in the Texas Ranger's appearance as he stalked deliberately into the courtyard, looking neither to the right nor to the left. For several seconds, there was silence, and not a gun was fired. The bandits were too amazed at Clint McKay's recklessness to do anything but stare.

Then came the booming, triumphant voice of La Vibora:

"Shoot heem! Keel the Ranger!"

Kid Wolf, stricken with horror, stood helplessly by the open door. He realized that Clint no longer cared much for his life, that he wanted to walk into the valley of the shadow with guns roaring, and to take as many of the murderers with him as he could.

Flame and smoke belched from many guns, and the Kid saw little puffs of dust fly from Clint's clothing. He stumbled, then righted himself. His gun roared once—twice—and again.

One of Vibora's breeds, bobbing up over the top of one of the horse stalls in order to shoot, was nailed between the eyes. Another screeched in agony.

Although he had been hit many times, the Ranger continued to walk right into the gang, his Colt spitting red vengeance. The Kid could see dark blots widening over his broad back, but he kept going, though his knees were wabbling. Another desperado went down before his flaming gun.

Never had the Kid seen anything so grand, so terrible. The picture of Clint McKay walking through that gun smoke was one he would never forget.

"Clint!" he gasped. "Clint, *compadre*——"

The Soldier of Misfortune was unable to endure it any longer. He, too, leaped into the patio, heedless of all consequences, ready to die with his friend. He would avenge him, in part, at least.

"I'm comin', Clint!"

An expert at "slip shooting"—thumbing the gun hammers with such rapidity that the explosions came in one continuous *brrr*—Kid Wolf instantly let the Vibora gang know he was on his way!

Shifting and side-stepping through the swirling smoke, the Kid advanced with both Peacemakers roaring from the level of his hips. His teeth were bared, and his eyes were hot blue stars. He was "comin' a-shootin'."

Clint McKay's shots were going wild, now, for he was riddled with bullets. He fell, lifted himself up on one arm, and fired for the last time. Then the Colt slithered from his nerveless hand.

The gang—what was left of it—had turned their guns on Kid Wolf. But he was hard to hit. Crouched low, he weaved through the powder fog like a boxer. And the gang had discovered that it wasn't healthy to expose themselves to Kid Wolf lead!

One of Vibora's henchmen had already gone down under the impact of two of the Kid's .45 slugs, and only half a dozen of the killers remained on their feet. Four of these were whites; Vibora, Deac and the others had been careful, thus far, to let their Mexican half-breed gunmen take most of the risks. And now

they were backing up, making for the break in the dobe wall.

Br-r-rang-bang!

As the Texan's guns trilled deafeningly at shorter range, Monte Gray whirled on his boot heels, then toppled to the flagstones, coughing his last. At almost the same instant, he accounted for another Mex, letting him have a lead plumb through the midriff.

The bony, slant-eyed ruffian, Clay Wilson, leaped at the Kid with flashing gun. His skull-like face was twisted in a grimace of fear and hate.

"Wolf, I got——"

Just what he'd got, he was never able to say. The Kid felt a sharp pang as a slug grooved the top of his left shoulder, and then he let drive. His bullet scorched through the desperado's heart.

La Vibora took a wild shot at the Kid and turned to run, hurling aside his empty gun. Deac Miller and Slippery Snider also sprinted shamelessly for the hole in the wall. Deac had been shot in the leg, but in his fear, he forgot his wound and outran the others.

"The *caballos*—the horses, pronto!" yelled the bandit leader as he dived through the opening.

Their backs would have made good targets, but shooting men from behind, no matter how much they deserved it, wasn't Kid Wolf's way. He didn't follow them, either. Instead, he retraced his steps back to where Clint McKay lay huddled. The Ranger was still breathing.

"You—shore made 'em high-tail it—Kid." He tried to smile.

"It was yo', amigo, not me," choked the Soldier of Misfortune. "It was what yo' did that gave 'em the feah of the heahaftah."

He lifted up the dying Ranger, got him with some difficulty across his shoulder, and carried him to the house.

The don's family, numbed by the tragedy that had overtaken the home, could scarcely realize that the fight was over and that La Vibora, at a terrible price, had been beaten off. Nor could the Kid. His ears were still ringing.

"The Ranger—is he——" Julio faltered brokenly.

Kid Wolf nodded. "I'm—afraid so," he said. "Would yo'-all mind leavin' me alone with him fo' a little while?"

He placed his stricken friend upon an ancient leather couch, riddled now with bullet holes, and wiped the muddy ooze from McKay's lips. The Ranger showed his thanks by opening and closing his eyes, and fumbled for the Kid's hand. In a little while, he spoke faintly:

"Kid, I reckon I'm goin' to take—the long—jump. Would yuh mind goin' to my headquarters at Paso and tell Cap—tell Cap whar to find Vibora and them others? I want the slate—clean."

"I'll clean it, Clint, mahself," the Kid promised huskily.

"Arkansaw's my home stampin' grounds," whispered the dying Ranger, "but I ain't got—no folks. I'd jist as soon be buried yere, Kid."

"Don't talk of that," said the Kid, and in his sorrow, his voice was almost harsh.

But he saw that his Ranger pard was going fast. Already the pupils of his eyes were widening, and he was laboring for breath.

"Reckon—what happened to me—is shore good fer the toothache," said McKay with a laugh that ended in a cough. A far-away look came over his face. He was past suffering, now, and tried to smile. "Kid," he confessed, "I reckon I *did* kind o' fall fer thet gal——"

His voice faded away. Kid Wolf reverently covered his face with his neckerchief. Clint McKay was riding Tar Baby now on a greener and happier range. And on that range, the Kid was sure, there would be a little señorita to greet him with a smile.

That peso trail had been a trail of violence and death, and the Soldier of Misfortune wasn't yet at the end of it.

CHAPTER IX.

AT ROBBERS' CAVE.

VIBORA and his only two surviving henchmen, Deac Miller and Slippery Snider, had jumped aboard their horses and galloped madly toward the Rio Grande. Before reaching the river, however, they made a sweeping circle and started southward by a devious route for their hide-out, their hidden cavern in the Leoncillo Mountains, of Chihuahua.

All three were in a savage mood. An easy victory had been turned into bitter rout because of two fighting Americans. La Vibora was in a towering fury, and his swearing, in both English and Spanish, was so vile and curdling that even his hardened companions flinched from it.

"What I cannot savvy," rasped the bandit leader, "is how they get away from Pedro, Carlos, and Pepe. *Zoquetes!* Fools! *Tontos!* They weel pay! I weel geeve them the same torture I would have used on the Ranger and the Lobo! And then—*pouf!* Bullets for the three of them!"

"Well, we kilt the Ranger, anyhow," snarled Deac spitefully. "I got him in the belly twice thet I know of. But I'd give plenty if I could git an even chance at Wolf!"

Snider laughed harshly. "I reckon we did have more'n an even chance," he sneered. "What was the matter with us—the look in them eyes of his, or what?"

"I didn't have a fair show with him," whined Deac complainingly. "This wounded leg o' mine was hurtin' so bad I couldn't see straight."

They pounded along on their weary broncs, crossing desolate desert stretches where the sun beat down fiercely on the bedraggled mesquites, over stony ridges and along winding arroyos. Dust devils danced on the far sky line, and the air was hot and oppressive.

The bandit trio stopped once to take a drink of whisky. Vibora hurled the empty flask into the brush, and they hammered on toward the mountains.

"We'll have to leave the country," groaned Deac Miller, his sallow face twitching in self-pity. "I don't even dare to go back to my saloon, now. I'll lose plenty by last night's work. I don't want to git my neck stretched. Wolf savvies whar our hide-out is, and he'll bring the Rangers or the Mex rurales——"

"Shut up!" slavered Vibora, his repulsive face twitching wrathfully. "Keep shut your mouth. It was you who talked, talked, wanting to make raid! I weel lose more than you."

Reaching the bare and forbidding foothills of the desolate mountain range, they sent their lathered broncs up the narrow ravine that led to their headquarters.

"If we'd been smart enough to plug them two jaspers afore we left last night," growled Slippery Snider, "things would have turned out different. Blast thet Wolf hombre! I hope I meet him ag'in some day."

"They must've kilt the fellers in makin' their git-away," grunted Deac Miller, glancing up toward the

cliffs. "I'd like to know how they done it."

Climbing along the narrow ledge that led upward along the face of the mountain, they soon reached the rope corral at the top. Dismounting stiffly, they strode toward the half-concealed cave mouth. Slippery drew the blanket aside.

"Lamp's still lit," he barked. "Look! Thar's Pedro on the floor, an'—they're dead, all right. Come on, Vibora!"

"Dead men do not snore like that," sneered the bandit leader as the three ruffians entered the hot and stuffy cavern. "They are asleep! Or drunk!" His bloated face darkened to a purple hue.

Vibora, Deac, and Slippery began kicking the three unconscious men unmercifully. But it did little good. Pepe cried out something, rolled his eyes, and went off to sleep again. Carlos, dragged to his feet by Vibora, fell immediately and kept on snoring. Pedro never opened his eyes, in spite of the slaps and cuffs Deac rained on his face.

"They've been pizened by somethin'," Slippery Snider decided.

"*Vaya!*" snarled the burly leader. "When they wake up, I weel keel them. The fools! I would shoot them now, but I want them to know first that eet ees Vibora who punishes."

"Well, anyhow," said Deac, with a slow grin, "with jist the three of us, we'll have all the more dinero when we split the swag. Come on, and let's start divvyin' it up!"

They made a pile of the various gold and silver articles of loot, their eyes shining greedily in the dim, smoky light of the oil lamp. They began wrangling among themselves. Vibora wanted half the treasure, the other half to be divided between Slippery Snider and Deac. There was little honor among the thieves, or generosity, either.

Finally, after much argument over a pair of massive golden candlesticks, they reached an agreement, and filled three separate leather saddlebags with the heavy plunder.

"And now we'll split up them silver pesos we nabbed from Don Antone the other day," chortled Deac, forgetting the pain of his nipped leg in his eagerness to get his hands on the booty. "Six thousand three ways is two thous' apiece. Not so bad."

They carefully counted out the coins, piling them into stacks of twenty until all were divided. La Vibora had uncorked a new bottle of tequila, and they were again in mellow good humor. Already they were making plans for new exploits.

"Thar's three extry hosses in the corral, and they're fresh," said Deac. "First of all, we'll hit fer Chihuahua City, then some place on the coast. I want to go to Panama and open a saloon thar. This stake will do it. Want to go into business with me, Slippery?"

Snider showed his snaggly teeth in a grin, shook his ugly head and patted his "open-toed" gun holster.

"Not fer me," he rumbled. "I make *my* way with my ol' talkin' iron. Vibora and me is goin' to head down Mexico City way. We'll soon have a better gang o' *matasietes* (gunmen) than the one we had."

Pedro, Carlos, and Pepe were showing signs of returning consciousness and were stirring uneasily. Vibora glared at them ferociously, and took another drink.

"In little while," he grunted, "we go long ways from here."

He jerked his head suddenly. A stream of daylight had entered the cavern as the blanket was jerked

from the entrance. A new voice, as cold and hard as the beat of an anvil hammer, cut in on the conversation:

"Yo'-all might go a longah ways than yo' think, yo' killahs! Dig fo' yo' cuttahs!"

At the cave mouth stood Kid Wolf, Soldier of Misfortune.

CHAPTER X.

GUNS, FISTS AND STEEL.

THE tall young Texan hadn't drawn his own guns; his .45s still nestled in their low, tied-down holsters. He was smiling, but the gleam of his white teeth was not a pleasant thing to see. The stains of powder smoke still streaked his lean, bronzed face, and the shoulder of his buckskin shirt was blotched with crimson.

"Fill yo' hands," he reminded them softly, still making no movement toward his own Colts. "I'm givin' yo' an even break."

The three desperadoes, who had been so busy at reckoning their ill-gotten gains that they hadn't heard the Kid's quiet approach, turned to face him. For a long moment, they stood staring, mouths agape.

They hadn't dreamed that Kid Wolf would run them down so soon, nor had it occurred to them that he would dare to face the three of them in their own lair. The Texan's cool confidence unnerved them.

Deac, especially, was terror-stricken. He had seen the Kid's blindingly swift gun draw before. Sweat oozed from his forehead in great beads.

"See yere, Wolf——" he gasped.

Vibora was breathing heavily, and his black eyes had narrowed to evil slits. He was in a tough spot. He remembered, too late, that he had hurled his empty gun away and hadn't thought to provide himself with another one. But he had his knife—his deadly ivory-handled *cuchillo*.

"What ah yo' cowahdly cut-throats waitin' on?" the buckskin-clad Texan drawled easily.

Deliberately, he reached for his "makings" and proceeded to roll a brown cigarette—an amazing thing to do, under the circumstances.

And Slippery Snider thought he saw his chance. He was a gun tipper, the fastest on the draw in Vibora's gang of experts. He did not, in fact, have to draw at all. For quick work, he simply fired from the end of his open-toed holster, swinging it upward on its swivel. At close range, such a gunman was deadlier than a buzzless sidewinder.

Snider's hand darted downward like a streak—and things happened.

Cran-n-n-ng! In the narrow confines of the cave, the explosion echoed deafeningly. There was a lance of crimson flame, a chugging sound as lead hit flesh, a roll of swirling smoke.

It was one of the Kid's .45s that had roared! His six-guns had leaped into his hands as if by magic. His first shot came before the cigarette paper that he had dropped had fluttered to the floor.

Snider's flying fingers had no more than touched the butt of his gun, when the bullet plowed his heart.

Deac's shaking hand went inside his black coat and came out holding his treacherous little pepper-box pistol. He swung the four-barreled weapon toward the Kid, and screamed profanely.

Both the Texan's guns flashed, the explosions coming like one. The bullets caught the crooked saloon keeper just above the belt line.

It was all over for Deac. Squall-

ing, he dropped his pistol, and started toward the cave mouth at a trot, his spidery body doubled up. He never reached it; he sprawled and lay still.

In a flat arc, the Kid's guns pivoted to cover La Vibora. The gang leader shrieked something in Spanish, gesturing toward his empty holster. On his twitching, hideous face was imprinted the fear of death. Again he yelled.

"*Bueno*, yo' snake!" stabbed the Kid's icy voice as he understood. "It's bettah—this way!"

Dropping his Colt Peacemakers, the Texan leaped at Vibora like a cougar. A straight left speared the desperado's face like a lightning bolt, rocking his head to one side. Then a right—another left. Vibora grunted at the impacts.

The Mexican was heavy, though, far bulkier than the lithe Texan, and very powerful. Blocking the Kid's next blow, he smashed back. His big fist crashed through the Texan's guard and sent him reeling into the wall.

Kid Wolf came bouncing back. Again he bored in, ripping lefts and rights at Vibora's jaw. A left closed one of the bandit's eyes; another brought a trickle of claret from his flat nose. Shifting, ducking, weaving out and in, the Kid peppered his larger opponent with stinging hooks and uppercuts.

Vibora, panting heavily and slobbering like a madman, tried to get his muscular arms on his bewildering enemy and bear him to the floor. But the Kid was too quick for him. He slashed the Mexican again, and Vibora wabbled to his knees, spitting broken teeth.

He snarled, springing up and swinging a blow at the Kid that would have flattened him if it had landed.

Vibora's evil face looked as if it had gone through a sawmill. Again the Kid probed it with a long left, measuring the distance, now, for his man-killing right.

"Snake!" he panted. "Yo' crawlly killah! Yo' murdahed mah friend. And when yo' killed Clint—— Take it, yo' sidewindah!"

Whack! His fist smashed like a pile driver to the tip of Vibora's jaw. There was dynamite in it.

The bandit chief left his feet and thudded into the cave wall, then crumpled into a heap.

He was stunned only for a moment. Shaking his head dazedly, he blinked at the Texan, swore, and then reached for the ivory handle of the knife that protruded from his scarlet sash.

"Look out, sah!" warned the Kid grimly.

A look of triumph leaped into the killer's swollen eyes. He whipped out the glittering blade, and his arm went back for the throw. With the *cuchillo*, La Vibora was an expert.

But he lacked a full second of being fast enough. The Kid's steel ace —the big Texas bowie knife—came into play! The right hand of the Soldier of Misfortune flashed behind his ear, whipping the bowie from its hidden sheath and flinging it, all in the same smooth motion.

The Kid seldom missed with that knife, and he didn't miss now!

Vibora never hurled his *cuchillo*. Instead, he clawed at something razor-sharp that quivered in his throat. With a strangled groan, he rolled over on his back, thrashed for a moment, and straightened out forever. The bowie had slashed his jugular.

The slate was wiped clean, at last, as the Kid had promised himself and Clint McKay. For several minutes, he stood over Vibora, the

grimness of his expression relaxing slowly. His Chihuahua job was nearly done.

Going over to the three half-conscious bandits, he bound their hands with sections cut from a lariat. Then he found a bucket full of water and doused them with it unmercifully.

"On yo' feet! It's mohnin'!" he snapped.

Sputtering and gasping, the trio of guards gradually regained their senses. Pedro blinked up at the Texan in bewilderment, Carlos swore confusedly, and Pepe stared at the trio of bodies on the cave floor and emitted a yap of fright and unbelief.

"What ees thees? We have been asleep, no?" they chorused.

"Yo' have been asleep, *yes*," the Kid corrected. "Come on, yo' skunkahroos! As soon as I load this gold and silvah on the hosses, we ah leavin' fo' the American side of the Rio Grande!"

"But—but there they weel hang us, Señor Lobo," quavered Pepe in terror.

"Yes, sah." The Texan smiled pleasantly.

He gave a little chuckle of satisfaction as he gathered up the plump bags of assorted loot and money. The river was calling to him, and this time, he wouldn't have far to go. First, to Don Antonio's, then to Texas again. Life, after all, was worth any hombre's time. The words of his favorite tune came in a cheerful melody:

"Oh, the sun shines brightah in Texas, the Rio!
The ranges ah widah and greenah,
The watah is wettah, the good men ah bettah,
And bad men a little bit meanah!"

A KIND-HEARTED COWBOY

A TYPICAL cowboy of the old days, Lod Calohan had an experience one time that was, to say the least, rather uncommon for a cow-puncher.

Four freight cars, loaded with wild brush goats, were on their way to Kansas City from down Pecos way. The weather was hot, and the goats were pretty tightly packed.

After some time, Lod began to feel sorry for those goats, and in order that they might have some air he opened the portholes of the cars toward evening. He felt happy that the poor goats would have plenty of fresh air during the night.

The goats were not dumb by any means. They helped themselves to more fresh air than Lod had given them.

When morning came the kind-hearted cowboy had the surprise of his life. Every one of the hundreds of goats had climbed through the portholes during the night and had leaped from car to car until they were distributed on the roofs of the box cars the whole length of the train.

When the train stopped, Lod and the herders tried to corral the goats, but as they had been raised in the wild hill country of southwest Texas, it was nothing at all for them to hop from one train top to another, and in less than half an hour they were on the tops of all the cars in the railway yards.

The jump to the ground was too high for them, so they just leaped from roof to roof and appeared to enjoy the exercise thoroughly.

It took the cowboys over four hours to catch those frisky goats and load them back into the cars where they belonged.

A Bad Case O' Gun Itch

By William A. Todd

Author of "Death Rides To Cayuse Crossing," etc.

IT seemed to "Tarp" Rollins that all he was getting these days from his partner, old "Music" Mayday, was an ever-increasing amount of worthless advice. Music had warned Tarp to stay away from Poker Gulch, because it was too hot a town for a yearling. But Tarp was sprouting horns and growing restless.

For his sixteenth birthday, he had decided to kick over the traces. He'd let the world know that he was alive and just as smart as the next hombre.

Awakening with the red Texas sun, Tarp helped himself to his first shave, with Music's razor, which wasn't dulled any by the removal of a faint peach fuzz. He dressed himself in new bull-hide chaps, green velvet shirt, yellow neckerchief, calfskin vest, and stitched boots.

He had told Music exactly what he wanted for a present, and it was no surprise when he found the outfit in a packing case near his bunk. Tall and lean, with a tanned, bony face, and clear blue eyes, he was a darn good-looking kid. Almost too good-looking.

If Tarp hadn't wanted Music to

admire him, he wouldn't have waited for breakfast.

Music was a weazened baldhead. He had pinkish eyes, a long, beaked snoot, and two missing front teeth. Not much of a companion for a rip-snorting young hombre like Tarp. Living with such a mossyhorn up on the lonely bench land, raising mounts for the Texas Rangers, was getting plumb tiresome.

Tarp was a little superior and condescending to Music all through the meal.

"Partner," Music said meekly, breakfast near over, "I was told by yore poor dead dad ter give yuh somethin' on this hyar memorable occasion."

Tarp set down his fourth cup of coffee.

"My pop told yuh ter give me a present?" he asked, surprised.

Music went to a chest, drew out a heavy package, and began unwrapping it.

"I'm thinkin' yo're still a bit young," the old wrangler said, "but I never disobeyed my superior officer. I ain't forgettin' I was yore pap's best bugler."

"What is the present?" Tarp asked, afraid that Music was going into a long speech about ancient history.

But the former Ranger bugler took his time.

"Yuh might think it was mean o' me ter keep yuh penned up on this bench land fer ten years," he said. "I had a reason fer runnin' strangers away from our ranch. I also had a reason fer not lettin' yuh go ter Poker Gulch."

"Shore, I know all about it, Music," the young wrangler broke in. "But what's in the package?"

"Yore pap made a lot o' enemies, the worst kind o' enemies," Music continued. "He couldn't help it, because he was a lawman. Some o' them enemies is still alive. They'd like ter do somethin' bad ter the son o' Captain Rollins. Yore pap figured that out. With his last words, Tarp, he asked me ter give yuh this on yore sixteenth birthday."

Almost out of breath, Music drew from oiled muslin a pearl-handled, .45 caliber, single-action Frontier Colt. There were a greased holster and a filled cartridge belt to go with it.

Tarp Rollins stared at the weapon, trembling. Overcome for a moment, he suddenly reached for it, exclaiming:

"Gosh! Look it! Gee! My pop's six-gun!"

A trace of a frown crossed Music's leathery brow. It was plain that he didn't care for Tarp's reaction. Perhaps Music was thinking that the young wrangler should have been more impressed by the history of the gift than by the weapon itself.

"Guns are dangerous, partner," Music said seriously. "I've taught yuh how ter use my horse pistol. That's because yuh'll be a Ranger captain like yore dad some day. But if yuh aim ter wear his cutter, yuh got ter remember one thing."

Tarp was on his feet, strapping the gun belt and holster about his slim hips, not listening very hard.

"It just fits, Music!" he cried, grinning. "I'll bet ten ter one that I can outdraw yuh."

Music tensed.

"I was goin' ter ask yuh ter remember never ter draw yore pap's gun on a man, unless in defense o' the law."

Tarp laughed boyishly.

"Ain't yuh got no sense?" he said. "I was jest kiddin' yuh, Music." He drew up tall, and fixed a mirror on

the breakfast table for a look at himself. "Not so bad, eh?" he asked. "Say, do yuh mind if I leave yuh with the dishes? This is my day, partner. I'm takin' a little ride on the best cayuse in the cavvy."

The baldhead narrowed his pinkish eyes.

"Where yuh goin', Tarp?"

"That ain't fer yuh ter ask, Music. Yuh'd think I was still a yearlin'."

"When yuh comin' back?" Music countered. "Fer dinner?"

"Yuh go on an' eat if I ain't hyar," Tarp replied, annoyed.

Taking a new tan ten-gallon hat from a wall peg, he went out the door with jingling spurs, leaving Music feeling very tired and heavy-hearted at the dirty breakfast table.

Poker Gulch was forty miles away.

On a long-legged white gelding called Captain after Tarp's father, it was no trip at all for the wrangler.

Leaving the bench land, he descended three thousand feet through the breaks of the Sunny Mountains. In the foothills, the slim pines became cedars, and in the draws and valleys of the lowlands, the cedars gave way to cottonwood and oak.

The scent of sage was in his nostrils, and he heard the cry of quail and robins.

He felt no remorse. This trip was his own gamble. Music had nothing to say about it. The old fossil had babied him too long. There was little left for Music to teach him. Not that Tarp was forgetting what the old Ranger bugler had done for him. But now it was time for the son of Captain Rollins to learn for himself.

Poker Gulch was a pretty stiff lesson for a beginner.

Once a thriving mine camp, now the town was deserted by hard-working sourdoughs and teamsters. Only the worst of the old gold-rush crowd remained. And they eked out a questionable living in the gambling halls and saloons, plucking clean the unsuspicious riders that came along the trail. But sometimes those riders were not easy meat, and it was Poker Gulch that paid the ante.

Tarp's first view of the town was a disappointment. It was just before noon when he came over the rim of the gulch by an old mining trail from a worthless digging.

Below him, the rickety shacks and crumbling cabins of Poker Gulch lay along one rutted main street. The plank sidewalks had caved in. The larger stores were deserted, with glass broken from the windows. Two pool rooms were boarded up. Only one saloon seemed to be operating. There were a handful of broncs tied to the hitch rail outside the ramshackle hotel, and there wasn't an hombre in sight.

Tarp halted, scowling. "It ain't as big as Fort Stockton or Del Rio," the wrangler said to himself. "Music must be loco to think that Poker Gulch packs a wallop."

Tarp's knowledge of towns came from trips to Ranger posts with Music to deliver trained broncs. They would eat at officers' mess, listening to stories of Tarp's famous father. Tarp was allowed to ride for a few days with the sons of the Ranger camp.

But the wrangler also had seen rodeos. Every autumn, Music hired him out to a prairie round-up crew for experience. And it was from the tales of the working waddies that Tarp learned of an exciting life that he expected to witness in Poker Gulch.

Now, spirits dampened, he spurred his big white bronc down the trail to a town that seemed more dead than alive. He didn't realize that it was the visiting riders that made Poker Gulch dangerous. The town could awaken like a sleeping rattler and strike swiftly with poisoned fangs.

Tarp entered the head of the rutted main street. In his new garb and mounted on a thoroughbred steel-dust horse, he was a sight to attract attention. His sharp eyes caught sight of a bearded hombre at a window in a cabin. He saw a gun-hung gent appear in the doorway of the old hotel and vanish again. At the livery, two tough-looking characters stepped to the sunlight and watched him pass.

Tarp swung down at the town drinking trough and let his bronc quench its thirst. He didn't know what to do with himself. He stood with hand on his gun butt, gazing upon the quiet buildings, and he hungered for conversation with some one.

When his horse stepped back from the trough, Tarp started aimlessly across the street, the animal in tow. His steps led unconsciously to the Sunny Saloon, where there was a hum of voices.

II.

A barrel-chested, unshaven hombre strode out the swinging doors, and halted short on seeing Tarp at the hitch rail. There were two walnut-handled guns tied down to the leather chaps on the fellow's thighs. He was dirty, beetle-browed, and unpleasant to look upon. But to Tarp, he was a prospect for conversation.

"Howdy!" the wrangler said, grinning.

The big fellow spat at the gutter. "*Buenos dias,*" the man replied noncommittally.

Tarp was uneasy. "I don't speak Mexican," he said innocently.

The unshaven hombre peered at him queerly, as if he thought he was being kidded. Nobody would have taken Tarp for a greenhorn. His deep tan, the way he wore the weapon that had seen service, and the way he had ridden the horse into town were proof that he knew his way around. He could have passed for a rodeo professional, or a wild kid that had come by a large sum of money in a lucky way.

"An' I don't speak Mexican either, stranger," the tough said sarcastically.

"That's funny," Tarp said, embarrassed. "I thought yuh did." He tied up his bronc, then looked at the gun-hung hombre, and found the fellow staring hard at his gelding. "Nice piece o' hossflesh, eh?" Tarp asked.

"It ain't got no brand," the barrel-chested man said suspiciously.

"We don't brand 'em," Tarp told him, foolishly. "Me an' Music sell 'em to the Rangers, an' they put their own sign on 'em."

The big hombre's eyes snapped, and he leaned forward.

"Music?" he questioned sharply.

"My pard," Tarp replied chuckling. "We have a breeding ranch up on the bench. I never been to Poker Gulch before. I reckon yuh folks don't know about me an' Music so well."

The tough was studying the wrangler intently. "Ain't I seen yuh somewhar before?" he asked coldly.

"I don't reckon yuh have," Tarp answered. "It might have been my father, Captain Rollins. Music says we look alike."

"Rollins," the unshaven hombre

said, and a hard grin twisted his lips. "No, I wouldn't know him as a neighbor. Yuh bet I wouldn't." He paused, right shoulder lowering. "Kid," he growled, "I think yo're bluffin' me. I had a white bronc like that one thar stolen, about a month ago."

A chill passed through Tarp Rollins.

"It couldn't be the same hoss," he said quickly. "I bred Captain myself. Yuh don't think that I'd swipe another man's bronc, do yuh?"

Two other tough-looking customers were coming out of the saloon. The barrel-chested hombre narrowed his black eyes.

"I not only think yuh stole my hoss," he snarled, "but I know yuh did. It's pretty lucky that I happened ter be passin' through Poker Gulch."

Tarp fell back, hot anger sweeping through his veins. He didn't realize that the big fellow was running a whizzer on him. He thought that the man meant what he said. He didn't figure that an unbranded bronc, running loose, would belong to the first hombre that burned his sign on it.

"Yo're loco!" Tarp cried out. "I can prove the bronc belongs to me. Yuh better be careful who yo're callin' a hoss thief."

"Yo're a stinkin' rustler!" the tough yelled savagely, loud enough for the town to hear. "Yuh stole my hoss. I got yuh with the goods. Make one play for yore gun, an' I'll shoot yuh like a rat."

Tarp drew in his breath. He had forgotten about his father's weapon. Now reminded of it, his right arm tensed. He didn't realize that Poker Gulch was deadly silent, watching the act. He knew only that he had been challenged, and that it was up to him to beat the other hombre's draw.

And Tarp would have drawn.

But a cry from the corner of the saloon building stopped him. It was the squeaky voice of old Music. There was death in Music's tone. Tarp had never heard his pard speak like he did.

"Scalp Drewry!" Music yelled. "When did yuh arrive from Mexico?"

Tarp saw the barrel-chested "Scalp" Drewry whirl to see the old bow-legged wrangler at the front corner of the saloon. There, Music stood, hunched over, fingers locked around the butt of a horse pistol that protruded from the waistband of his blue denims. There was a stained, flat-brimmed Ranger hat on Music's bald head, and a tarnished bugle was suspended at his left side by a cord that looped his neck at the right shoulder.

It was a surprise to Tarp to see his old pard. He couldn't account for Music's presence. He didn't have time to figure that Music might have suspected where Tarp was going, and had followed him to Poker Gulch to take care of him.

Tarp heard Scalp Drewry exclaim: "A trap! Look out, boys!"

Things happened too swiftly for the young wrangler to take part. He saw the two hombres behind Scalp leap for the saloon doors. At the same time, Scalp went for his guns, with a movement of his wrists that Tarp's eyes could not follow.

The young wrangler glimpsed the sunlight flashing on the up-whipping barrels of Scalp's weapons. But those guns did not blaze. A thunderous roar came from the front corner of the saloon where Music stood, and Tarp realized that the old Ranger bugler had beaten Scalp Drewry's draw.

Terrified, Tarp Rollins tore his own six-gun free from its holster. He saw Scalp Drewry thrown backward to the saloon doors by the impact of Music's heavy bullet. Tarp saw hands reach out, grab the barrel-chested tough, and drag him kicking into the barroom.

Music was shouting to Tarp. "Get yore bronc, Tarp. Clear out."

Tarp paid no heed. This was a bad fight. He knew that Scalp had not been wounded fatally. The big fellow had only been stunned for a moment by the heavy load from Music's horse pistol. There were other gunmen inside the barroom, and they would take up the quarrel.

Tarp dropped to a knee, thumbing back the hammer of his father's gun. He was so excited that he failed to release his finger pressure on the trigger, so that the gun hammer didn't catch at the cocking latch, and the hammer fell against a shell.

Crash! The wrangler's weapon exploded, slamming a bullet into the saloon doors, smashing a hole through them.

Tarp heard cries of alarm inside the saloon, and the thud of fleeing boots. He thumbed back his hammer again, aware that Music was beside him, untying his bronc's reins from the hitch rail. Suddenly Music grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Come on, yuh little fool!" the Ranger bugler shouted. "That was Scalp Drewry, the worst cutthroat on the border. He's got a gang with him. We don't stand a chance."

"Let go o' me!" Tarp cried wrathfully. "That hombre called me a hoss thief. If he's an outlaw, we'll finish him an' his gang."

"Yuh won't finish nobody!" Music snarled.

For years, Tarp had regarded the baldhead as a worn-out, timorous old fossil. So the young wrangler was taken completely off his guard when Music swung him around with a quick jerk of the left arm and struck him between the eyes with a rock-hard fist. It was a blow that flattened Tarp in the gutter. Groggy but not out, he felt Music snatch the six-gun out of his hand.

The astonishment of the attack gave way to bitter rage, and Tarp leaped to his feet. In a blur, he saw Music charging into the barroom, shooting from the hip. Tarp lunged after him, tripped on the edge of the plank sidewalk, and fell hard. He had no gun now, and when he got to his feet, he heard a shriek of pain.

For a second, Tarp thought it was Music, and it sobered him. He sprang through the saloon doors, fists clenched.

It was to see Music standing beside a dead man in the middle of the barroom. Music was covering the bartender with smoking weapon. There was no one else in the saloon. Music was speaking in a hard, grating tone:

"Come on out from behind that counter with arms reachin' fer the ceilin'."

The fat bartender was deathly pale. "It wasn't my fault, Music," he whined. "I didn't know what them customers was like. I didn't know they left their broncs in the brush outside the back." He raised his arms and stumbled out from behind the bar. "The fight was none o' my makin', Music. Honest, it wasn't."

"I've heard that story too many times before," the baldhead snapped. "Yuh've got too many tough customers. How bad was Scalp Drewry hit? Tell the truth."

Tarp checked an impulse to butt

into the conversation. He was seething with rage at Music for having taken the battle away from him.

"I don't know how bad he was hit," the bartender answered nervously. "He could walk, Music, but his left shoulder looked like it was out o' commission."

Music laughed harshly. "Bury this rat," he ordered, and turned to the door, stepping over the dead gunman in the middle of the floor.

Tarp's eyes halted the old wrangler.

"Give me my gun!" Tarp snapped.

Music's eyes fell to the weapon in his hand. He seemed to hesitate for a moment. And then he said meekly:

"Shore, pard. I'm plumb sorry I caused yuh all this trouble."

Tarp took the weapon that Music extended butt foremost. Turning, he went out to the street, ejecting empty shells, and thumbing fresh loads into the hot chamber.

His pride was severely injured. He had made a fool of himself, and he knew it, but he could not admit it. For nights, Tarp had dreamed of his first gun duel, which he always won. But when it came to the real thing, he had been a rank tenderfoot.

Music stepped up beside him. "I didn't mean ter hit yuh, Tarp," he apologized. "But I got an ol' grudge agin' Scalp Drewry. Me an' yore pap chased him across the border, ten years ago. Scalp has got it in for me."

Tarp knew that the explanation was false. Music was trying to make him feel better, but it was no go. Tarp couldn't let the baldhead baby him any longer. This was a man's world, and Tarp knew he had to fight his own way through it.

The young wrangler swung up to the saddle, crimson with embarrassment.

"If I want ter kill myself, it's my own business," Tarp said angrily. "I ain't forgettin' that yuh hit me when I was down, Music. I ain't yellow, an' yuh know it."

"Shore I know it, pard," Music replied, looking up at him. "Won't yuh wait fer me ter ride back ter the ranch with yuh?"

A dark scowl furrowed Tarp's brow. "Yuh think that Scalp's gang will be layin' fer me, don't yuh?" he demanded.

"It ain't that," the former Ranger bugler said, "but I'd like ter talk things over with yuh. I figure it's time fer us ter clean out the ranch. We'll sell all the hosses. Mebbe we kin try somethin' more interestin' ter do. We might try ter jine the Rangers. They might take yuh on, even if yuh are a mite young."

A grim suspicion took hold of Tarp. "Yuh can't fool me no longer," he said tartly. "Yuh think that Scalp will be after our unbranded broncs. Yuh aim ter run out, so I won't get hurt." He paused, staring hard at the blinking Music. "Waal, yuh kin sell all the broncs. I'm followin' my own trail from now on."

"Whar to, Tarp?" Music cried. "Yuh wouldn't desert me, would yuh?"

"Shore I would," the young wrangler snapped. "I ain't no kid no longer. Me an' yuh are washed up. Yuh can have my share o' the cavvy fer yore pay. That's that."

"Tarp!" Music yelled.

Tarp's spurs raked the white horse, and the animal sprang out. The wrangler saw Music lunge to catch its bridle and miss. Tarp swung the bronc wide of the floundering baldhead, threw in his spurs

again, and shot down the main street like a bolt of lightning. Over his shoulder, he spied Music running for the other end of town, where the ex-Ranger bugler had evidently left his own horse.

But Tarp knew that Music had no chance of catching his white cayuse.

III.

Texas wasn't easy on Tarp Rollins. Without money, he had to hunt for his grub for the first week, thinking he'd soon snare a job, and build a grubstake. But there were no jobs in the summer for a good-looking kid in an expensive outfit, riding a white bronc worth almost a thousand dollars.

The animal got so thin that Tarp had to sell his bull-hide chaps and calfskin vest for mash to fatten it up. He branded it with a TR, so that the animal would be harder to steal.

From one ranch to another, he drifted, and he suffered horribly from loneliness. Every night, sleeping before a camp fire, he'd try to argue himself into going back to Music. But he was as stubborn as a mule. And the more he thought about the fight in Poker Gulch, the more he realized that he had to prove himself.

He was in an ugly temper when he struck the Flying Z Ranch and offered to break any and all wild cayuses on the spread for a dollar apiece. A grinning foreman gave him five broncs. Tarp broke four, but the last one threw him out of the corral.

The foreman laughed at Tarp, and Tarp took offense. One word led to another, and there was a fist fight. Tarp came out with two black eyes, a missing tooth, and a busted rib.

The licking taught him that he wasn't as tough as he thought he was. He was hooted off the ranch by the outfit, and he vowed he'd come back some day and show them.

Two weeks later, in Pecos Crossing, he got the shock of his life when he pulled up at the post office to ask if there was any work in the neighborhood. Luckily, the town was having a siesta. Tarp swung down from the saddle and faced a "wanted" poster with his photograph decorating the written text, which said:

Wanted Alive
$500 Reward
Tarp Rollins
for
Killing Pete Smith
in Poker Gulch, Texas

Tarp's mouth dropped open, then snapped shut. He felt weak in the knees. It didn't take him long to figure out that the dead man mentioned in the poster was the corpse left in the Poker Gulch barroom by Music, after the fight with Scalp Drewry's gang.

"Gosh!" the wrangler exclaimed, drawing back to his bronc. "Music blamed that on me. The Rangers are after me."

His brain flamed with terrible thoughts. If those posters had been sent throughout the State, every sheriff would be watching for him to claim the reward. His white horse was a dead give-away.

Tarp swung to the saddle and rolled his spurs. His first impulse was to leave Texas quickly. He had never known what it was to be hunted, and he never had been able to figure out why outlaws always kept to the back trails, and were so careful of their movements.

Tarp was certain that the hombre left in the Poker Gulch barroom was dead. His gun had killed him. It might have done the job when Tarp fired through the doors. Mebbe Music hadn't beefed the outlaw after all. Mebbe the fellow wasn't an outlaw, but had been standing in the bar when he went down with a bullet.

"I might be a murderer," Tarp groaned. "I'll never get in the Rangers now.

That night, holed up in a cave, he was tortured by the memory of stories of legal hangings. Hungry, cold, lonesome, he tried to decide on his next move. His blue eyes narrowed to wolfish slits. Nobody was going to catch him. No, sir! He'd fight for his freedom. He'd strike out for Mexico.

His hand stole to the bone-handled gun on his right thigh and quickly let go of it. He remembered that Music had warned him never to draw the weapon except in defense of the law. What a fool Tarp had been! But now, he could no longer help it. He'd have to protect himself with that gun.

He got to his feet and started practicing the draw. He remembered the speed with which Scalp Drewry had flashed his weapon. And old Music had even beaten Scalp. Tarp would have to be as quick as a cat to come out on top against anybody.

Fear of the strong arm of the law sent Tarp Rollins fleeing to the mountains. Like a lobo, he learned quickly to cover his route. He traveled game trails. Sight of a hoofprint would drive him miles off his route.

His hunger for coffee, bacon, beans, and bread brought him to mountain shacks and adobe huts on prickly-pear flats. He bartered his blankets, saddle, and spare clothing, with ice in his eyes.

Whenever he approached a dwelling, he inspired fear, and he knew it. He received guarded tips about where others like him had gone, and he knew he was learning certain owl-hoot trails without asking.

Nearing the border, he was riding bareback, without boots, needing a hair cut, and as scrawny as a stray pup in the wintertime.

Tarp had to have information about the border. Desperation sent him down a timbered canyon toward a spiral of smoke. He figured that he was coming to a mountain hamlet, on a back smuggling trail, and that he could parley with a peon.

His bronc was caked with mud and so thin that it looked like an old buckboard bronc. No one would guess the strength in its big body.

At a slow, careful trot, Tarp threaded down the rocky path, eyes alert. He rounded a bend in the canyon. Suddenly, his heart stopped, and his hands froze on his bridle reins.

A man slipped out of a patch of brush, a leveled carbine in his hands. A silver badge glittered on his vest. A Ranger!

"Halt!" the Ranger said coldly. "One peep out o' you, kid, an' I'm shooting."

A current of electricity went through Tarp's right arm, heating it for the draw. Trapped, he could think of nothing but fight. Yet something held him. It might have been the man's badge. He remembered his father's wearing one like it.

Tarp took a deep breath. "Got me," he said, and he felt tears welling to his eyes.

"Get off that nag," the Ranger said, "an' unbuckle yore gun belt."

There was a stirring in the brush, and four other Rangers moved out to the trail. They stared at Tarp coldly.

"We better tie him to a tree," one of them said. "He looks like some sheep-herder's kid, but he might be a spy for Scalp Drewry's outfit."

The wrangler stiffened. For a moment, he couldn't move, despite the Ranger orders for him to dismount. Then, swiftly, he realized that they didn't recognize him. They didn't know who he was. They took him for some half-starved mountaineer.

What was more, the Rangers had dangerous business ahead. They were guarding this trail, waiting for something. In the hamlet down the canyon, a fight was ready for them. They had mentioned Scalp Drewry.

Tarp came off his horse with a jump, eyes flashing.

"I'm keepin' my gun," he said excitedly. "Listen ter me! Yuh might think I'm loco, but I'll lend yuh a hand. Yuh ain't goin' ter tie me up. I've got somethin' ter prove."

The Rangers separated and started moving around him.

"No monkey business, kid," their leader, who was a sergeant, warned him. "Unbuckle that belt, an' let it drop. This ain't no bluffin' matter. If yuh've got friends in Dead Man's Hollow, they don't stand a chance. We've got every trail plugged out of that smuggling nest."

Tarp didn't seem to hear. "So Scalp Drewry is down there," he growled. "I'm finishing him. Yuh kin hang me later, but yo're not stoppin' me now."

The five Rangers were surrounding him. It was plain that they wanted to take him without any disturbance that would warn their foes down the canyon. They could leap in and grab him before he could draw.

Tarp sank into a crouch, a young wolf, lips drawn back over his teeth, eyes flicking right and left. He didn't stand a chance, but he meant to fight.

The unexpected happened. At least, it was a surprise for Tarp. Perhaps not for the Rangers, who had been awaiting some signal.

The silent canyon awakened to the silvery notes of a distant bugle. It was a hurried tune that made the heart leap. The echoes chased one another up through the breaks in the high cliffs and on into the blue sky. It was a thrilling message that stirred Tarp Rollins to the depths. He recognized the Ranger call to charge.

"Music!" he gasped. "Music Mayday!"

His words checked the Rangers, and held them for a precious moment. And Tarp leaped for the bare back of his white bronc.

He cracked the animal on the flank as he went up. His fingers caught in the silken mane, and the horse sprang out. Tarp saw the Rangers grab for his ankles, and he kicked them in the chest. As the lawmen fell, the horse was away like an arrow from a bow.

Shouts of alarm followed Tarp around the canyon bend. He feared shots, but none came. It might have been the name of Music Mayday that saved his life. But he knew that the Rangers would be after him as soon as they could recover their own horses from the brush.

IV.

Ahead of Tarp, the bugle once more sent its clear notes to the echoing cliffs, and then the call broke off in the middle. Tarp heard

the crash of six-guns. He jerked his own weapon from its holster, kicking the bronc to faster speed.

The rocky trail turned once more with the curve of the canyon, and Dead Man's Hollow lay directly ahead of the wrangler. In one swift glance, he read what was happening in that small hamlet of twelve log buildings.

Booted and belted hombres were running from doorways to horses tied to hitch rails. Guns were in their hands. Some of the men were shooting at a cabin, from the front window of which came the hurried tune of the bugle again.

"It's Music Mayday!" Tarp cried. "He said he was going back in the corps. He slipped into town to find Scalp Drewry."

Tarp was at the main street as a dozen riders whirled their broncs to flee. But the entire gang was not on the run. Several were charging the cabin that sheltered the Ranger bugler. Tarp could hear one of them yelling orders, and he recognized the voice of Scalp Drewry.

"It's a trick, I'm tellin' yuh!" the barrel-chested outlaw was calling to his men. "There ain't no Rangers around hyar. That bugler is tryin' ter scare us away. One o' yuh take the back door. Shoot through the windows. Don't let him escape."

The pounding of the white bronc's hoofs drew the frightened glances of Scalp's gang. But they didn't suspect danger in the person of a hatless, barefooted kid on a muddy cayuse. Their fear was that the Ranger bugle was bringing other foes, and they threw in their spurs and raced away, leaving Scalp and two other men to tackle the cabin.

Tarp drew his horse to a plowing halt and vaulted from its back.

"Scalp!" he cried out. "Yo're my bear meat! Shoot! I'm Tarp Rollins, yuh cutthroat coyote!"

About to plunge through the cabin's front door, big Scalp Drewry whirled. Tarp heard the outlaw gasp, "Rollins!" And then Scalp ducked low to the ground and dodged, as if to avoid Tarp's shot.

Tarp was not unnerved. For over a month, he had been hunting with his father's weapon, making every bullet count for a meal. Running rabbits and flying quail had fallen at the pressure of the trigger. Tarp could not be fooled by a moving target.

He had called Scalp's hand, had given him fair warning.

Tarp fired with deadly intent. He didn't have to line his sights. He was as cool as a veteran duelist, and he knew his aim was perfect.

Crash! As Tarp's six-gun kicked, he saw the flash of Scalp's .45.

There was just that much time between the two explosions. Tarp's bullet was striking hard into Scalp's chest as the outlaw's bullet left the barrel. The gun in Scalp's hand wavered a fraction, and the bullet from it snatched hair from Tarp's head.

A cry tore from Scalp's throat, and his eyes opened wide. He swayed on his feet, smoking weapon falling from his fingers. And then he collapsed.

There was a war whoop from the cabin behind the outlaw. Tarp saw the front door burst open, and out of the cabin came a bow-legged hombre with two weapons winking flame. But the guns were not shooting at the wrangler. They were blasting down the two other outlaws that were lining their sights on Tarp in vengeance for the death of Scalp Drewry.

"Eat Ranger lead!" the bow-legged hombre was yelling.

Despite the man's woolly chaps, checkered shirt, and tan ten-gallon hat, Tarp recognized him.

"Music!" the wrangler exclaimed. "It's me—Tarp!"

Now shots sounded outside of the hamlet. Tarp heard the thudding of hoofs.

"Hole up in the cabin, Tarp!" Music shouted. "The wolf pack is comin' back with the Rangers on their heels."

For a moment, Tarp hesitated. The fight had just begun for him. He wanted to stay in the open and see it through. And then he remembered how he had disobeyed Music once before and had almost lost his life.

Tarp darted for the cabin, calling to Music to enter ahead of him. Music leaped into the big dark room. Tarp slammed the door shut behind them. And then he heard the outlaw broncs galloping into the hamlet.

"They almost caught us between two fires," Music said to him. "Yuh got Scalp Drewry, pard. The rest will surrender when they know that the Rangers have 'em cornered. We hold the center of town. Take that left window, an' let the gang know it."

Tarp blinked at his old partner. "Shore, Music, I'll do what yuh say," he answered. "Yuh know best."

As he peered out the front window, he heard Music chuckle. Tarp saw the gang returning. In front of the cabin, they halted, yelling to one another to learn if they were bottled up.

At the foot and at the head of the street, big-hatted riders appeared, carbines leveled.

The outlaw horsemen dropped their weapons and lifted their arms.

Tarp turned away from the window and saw Music grinning at him.

"The Rangers want me, too," Tarp said bitterly. "I killed a gent in Poker Gulch. There's a reward out for me, Music."

Music came toward him. "I'm collectin' the reward, Tarp," he said, still grinning. "That fellow yuh shot by accident through the saloon doors was a 'wanted' man. I sent the Rangers lookin' fer yuh, because I wanted ter divvy up the cavvy with yuh. It was a frame-up, Tarp. Yuh should have known that."

Tarp's face hardened. But he couldn't hold the expression. A smile twisted his lips.

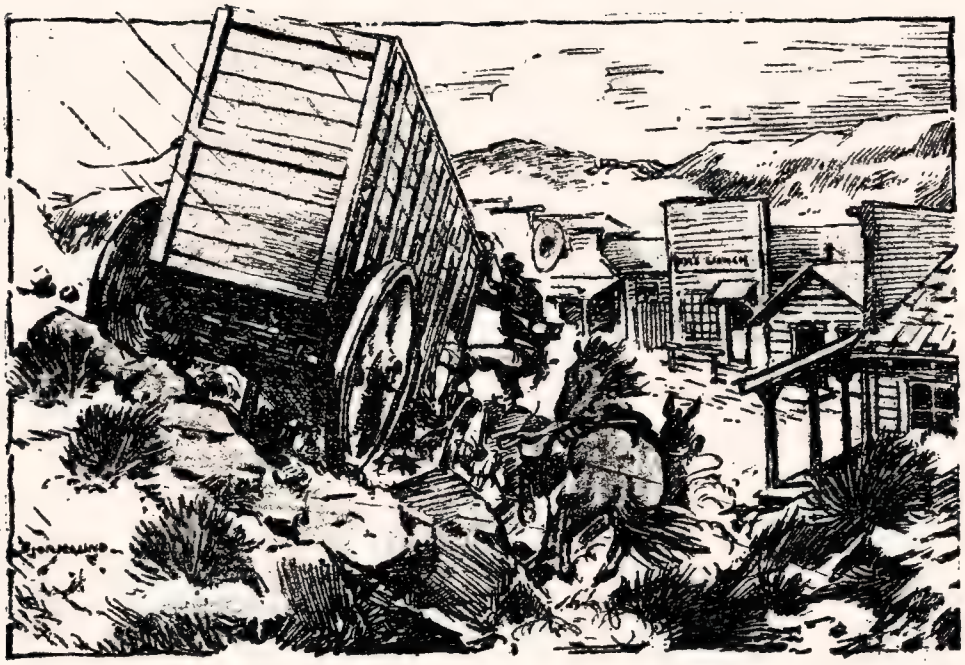
"I guess I'm awful stupid," he said. "I've found that out since leavin' yuh, Music."

"Why, yuh got more brains than any hombre I ever heard of, Tarp," Music protested. "Yuh shore hid yore trail through the State o' Texas. If I hadn't gone lookin' fer yuh, I never would have found Scalp Drewry holed up hyar. An' jest when I figures on gettin' credit fer capturin' his gang, yuh turns up an' nails 'em all. Jest wait until I tell the Rangers that. If they don't take yuh inter the corps, I'll eat my old horn without no salt an' pepper."

Tarp slumped into a chair. "Music, I've got ter tell yuh the truth," he said. "I didn't know Scalp was in Dead Man's Hollow. It was all an accident. I wanted to prove to yuh that I wasn't yellow. That's why I shot him."

Music put a hand on his shoulder. "Yuh don't have ter explain," the baldhead chuckled. "We're pards ag'in, ain't we?"

"We shore are, Music," the wrangler replied quickly. "I'll never run out on yuh ag'in. I'll listen ter yuh, too."



Calamity Rides Misery Basin

By Lee Bond

Author of "Meddlin' With Hoss Thieves," etc.

THE two cowpokes reined in with amazed and somewhat angry grunts when they came to the end of the long ridge they had followed down from the distant rim rocks. The riders sat their horses now, staring out and down, frowning into the hot, dry wind that sucked up from the vast, brown-looking basin below them.

Then their eyes came to the ribbon of road tantalizingly close along the lower slopes. The road looked smooth and brown and a big wagon, drawn by four patiently plodding mules, moved slowly along it.

"If this ain't the beatin'est luck!" one of the cowpokes growled. "Thunderation, Calamity, we took the wrong ridge! Look at the brush an' rocks an' gullies between us an' that road we want to reach."

The speaker was "Shorty" Stevens—a bantam-sized waddy with sandy hair, snapping gray eyes and the square, firm chin of a born scrapper.

Shorty's saddle pard, "Calamity" Boggs, made a hoarse, moaning

sound and slumped forward over the saddle horn. He was a big, powerfully muscled waddy, with curly black hair, falcon-keen black eyes, and had the general expression of a homeless and saddened bloodhound.

"Yeah, I see thet bresh an' rocks an' gullies, pard," Calamity gloomed. "An' I see my finish, hyar an' now. I'll never live to reach yonder road, I bet."

"Fer Pete's sakes, don't start belly-achin'!" Shorty snapped peevishly. "We can put our broncs down this slope, an' yuh know it."

"I'll never make it, I tell yuh," Calamity insisted mournfully. "My hoss will fall an' mangle me to bits. Or mebbe a rattler will rear up out o' thet bresh an' fang me. If one o' them two things don't happen, then lightnin' will hit me, or I'll die horrible o' sunstroke."

"Dang it, can't yuh *ever* be cheerful?" Shorty yapped sharply.

The little waddy did not expect a reply to his question, for he had trailed around with big, gloomy Calamity Boggs long enough to know that Calamity certainly kept to himself any cheerful thoughts he ever had.

"Hey, look at the way that feller down there is drivin'," Shorty called, before Calamity could think up another misery-laden remark.

Calamity's sharp eyes focused on the slowly moving wagon, and after a moment his big head nodded slowly. "Thet proves it," he croaked. "Shorty, I could feel some awful thing sort o' hangin' over me the minute I looked down into thet Misery Sink, yonder. Now I know what it is."

"Yeah?" Shorty was more than a little skeptical, for he sensed that Calamity was simply mouthing more of his eternal gloom.

"Shore, I've got it figgered," the big puncher said hoarsely. "Shorty, they's evil speerits on this hyar mountain! Thet feller drivin' yonder wagon knows it, an' is scairt them speerits will jump him or mebbe stampede his mules."

"Yuh whey-brained galoot, they's no sich animal as an evil speerit!" Shorty snarled hotly. "Dang it, Calamity—— What the——"

Shorty's last words came in a wild yelp. The hombre who had been easing that wagon along at an extremely cautious pace had suddenly reared straight up out of the high spring seat, hands waving, lines falling to the right and left. Then he toppled slowly sidewise and bounced limply into a tangle of thick brush.

The four mules began lunging and prancing uneasily. Then the hard, brittle *whang* of a rifle drifted up to the two watchers above the road. Two men darted out of the thick brush, one of them a runty-appearing hombre and the other a slim, wiry-looking fellow.

The runty jasper with the yellow shirt wore a black Stetson and carried a rifle in one hand as he darted to the heads of the lead mules and pulled them to a stop. The other hombre wore a black-and-white-checkered shirt and a big brown Stetson that looked stiff and new.

"Bushwhackers, by grab!" Shorty Stevens hissed. "Look, Calamity! That jigger with the brown sky piece is gittin' up into the back o' that wagon an' loosenin' the tarp that covers whatever the wagon is haulin'."

"Come on!" Calamity growled sharply. "There's somethin' valuable on thet wagon, or them two wouldn't 'a' killed thet driver cold like they did. While they're ransackin' the wagon, we kin ease down to thet lower bench yonder an' git in gun range o' the murderin' pair."

Shorty nodded, spun his roan cayuse and followed Calamity's big dun down the slope.

Calamity might groan and mouth his gloom under ordinary circumstances, but let a crisis arise, and the big jasper could use his head much better than the average hombre. And when it came to a fight of any sort, Calamity Boggs was, Shorty often vowed, worth any three men who ever forked leather.

Shorty was following his big pard now, depending upon Calamity to bring them within gun range of those two bushwhackers who had murdered the unsuspecting driver. But to the amazement of both Shorty and Calamity, the wagon and the two bushwhackers were nowhere in sight when they reached the bench Calamity had pointed out.

A sharp bend in the road below kept them from seeing very far along it, but to their ears came the roaring clatter of big wheels and the clacking of heavy hubs.

"The wagon is bein' drove on down toward the basin," Shorty cried. "Them snakes are likely lookin' fer a place where they can git off the road before they take whatever it is they want off the wagon."

Calamity nodded, flung the spurs to his bronc, and went crashing down a dangerously steep bit of slope. Then the two punchers were on the smooth, hard road, both glancing briefly toward the still, huddled figure of the wagon driver.

The man lay face up, and the two drifting cowpokes did not even slacken speed after one glimpse of that still, white face and the staring, sightless eyes. In that one brief glance, both Shorty Stevens and Calamity Boggs saw that the driver had been little more than a boy.

"That younker didn't have a chance, Calamity!" Shorty Stevens shrilled above the thunder of their running broncs. "We both know that them bushwhackers let him drive past 'em, then shot him from behind. If I can git my sights notched on them two snakes——"

"Look sharp!" Calamity cut in grimly. "When we round yonder bend, the wagon will be in sight."

Their horses shot around the bend even as Calamity spoke, and two hundred yards or more ahead of them was the huge wagon, gathering speed at each lurching bound as four stout, frightened mules lunged madly forward. Shorty and Calamity both groaned in angry dismay, for the wagon was driverless, and they could see that the lines had been tied about the seat spring in such a manner that the wild-eyed mules would still have plenty of slack for the running they were doing.

"Circle back!" yelled Shorty. "Them bushwhackers have got what they wanted out o' the wagon an' took to the brush. If we strike their sign quick enough we can snag the coyotes."

"Look yonder—down in the sink!" Calamity cried. "Shorty, we've got to stop thet wagon, or some other innocent folks will git killed."

Shorty Stevens groaned inwardly as he looked ahead of the wagon and saw some scrawny scattered buildings at the foot of the grade. That handful of scabby buildings marked the village of Vista, and Shorty Stevens needed no one to tell him that people would be killed if those four fear-crazed mules roared into the little town with the huge, bouncing wagon.

With that thought in mind, Shorty leaned over, squalled into his roan's flattened ears, and went roaring down the road after the wagon,

Calamity Boggs right at his side. The ever-steepening down grade and the wild frenzy of the four big mules gave the huge wagon a tremendous speed, yet Shorty and Calamity gradually overhauled it.

"Head the mules," Calamity roared. "I'll try to git up in the seat."

Shorty had no time to argue that Calamity was taking dangerous chances. The little waddy shot on forward, while Calamity swerved his dun in close, keen eyes watching the slapping motion of the big wagon. If the vehicle even grazed the dun bronc——

Calamity shut that grim thought from his mind, kicked his feet loose in the stirrups, and ventured still closer. Then he reached out, caught a stout sideboard and the brake-rod guard, and gave himself a powerful thrust upward. Calamity landed sprawled across one end of the spring seat, squirmed around, righted himself, and grabbed the fluttering lines just as Shorty Stevens leaned from the saddle and slapped the leaders across their mouse-colored noses with a doubled rope.

Calamity heaved back on the reins, and the mules slowed somewhat, although they were far from being stopped. Shorty struck the leaders once more, causing them to rear and lose speed rapidly. Then the big wagon was grinding down to a saner pace, and through the swirling dust fog Shorty Stevens grinned up at his big, sweating pard as the wagon rolled and lurched past him.

Calamity's powerful shoulders bunched, and he was slowing the panting, lunging mules still more when Shorty's voice shrilled wildly from behind him.

"Jump, Calamity!" Shorty half screamed the words. "That wagon is loaded with cases o' dynamite, an' there's a burnin' fuse hooked to the stuff. Jump!"

Calamity jumped all right, but not overboard as his pard had meant. The big waddy lurched straight up, spun, and saw that the tarp had blown aside during the wild race, and that the wagon held many cases of dynamite. Calamity saw, too, that a blackened, smoking fuse ran to one of the dynamite boxes.

Then the wagon lurched. Calamity almost fell overboard, and was forced to drop the reins and grab for a hold on the spring seat. The moment those reins went slack the four mules bolted once more, roaring down the grade at maddening speed, heading straight for the little town of Vista with a cargo of dynamite that was due to explode at almost any minute!

II.

Calamity Boggs had not had time to unknot the reins from the curved spring of the seat. Nor was he bothering about those reins now. In a spot where a lot of hombres would have lost their heads, Calamity Boggs was keeping cool.

The big waddy was actually shaking in his boots, and his rugged face had a sick, green look as he stared in horror at those closely piled dynamite cases and the sputtering, smoking fuse which ran beneath the pried-up lid of a center case of the explosive stuff. No man could have looked upon such a horrible death without shuddering, regardless of how nervy he might have been.

But Calamity, even as he shuddered in genuine alarm, thought of that village below, and of the people—women, children, and men—who would be blasted into eternity if the mules reached the town with this cargo. And, thinking of those things, he dived straight over the

spring seat, gasping and grunting as the dynamite cases bruised and battered him. But he clawed on across them, hands reaching for the sputtering fuse.

The sway of the wagon caused him to miss the weaving, snakelike thread of the hissing fuse several times. Then his fingers found it, and he barely felt the sting of fire as spitting powder from the fuse seared his palm.

Calamity hunched over the very case into which the fuse ran, clawed up the loose lid, and lifted the fuse. It ran into a greasy yellow cylinder of a dynamite stick, and the stick came dangling up as the big puncher pulled on the fuse. Calamity saw that there were bare inches left, and clawed the stick of dynamite loose, dropping it. He flung the fuse with its slim brass primer far out to one side, and began gulping air as if he had been under water for long minutes without a breath.

Through the swirling tan dust fog behind the wagon, Calamity saw Shorty Stevens riding hard. Shorty's face looked white and set, and the little puncher was wagging his jaws frantically, although Calamity could not hear his voice.

But the fuse was gone now, and Calamity's mind turned instantly to the business of stopping the runaway mules before they crashed into the little village below.

The big puncher twisted about, and cried out hoarsely when he saw how dangerously close to Vista he was. The powder boxes barked Calamity's shins as he scurried back across them, but he seemed not to notice. He reached the spring seat, got solid footing behind it, and grasped the lines, to lean back with all his might in a series of hard, fierce jerks.

Calamity saw the first buildings of the town fairly leap at him, and put still more punishing force into his sawing jerks. Then Shorty's roan shot out of the dust cloud, and the little waddy was whipping the mules across their faces once more with a doubled rope.

The mules thrashed and skidded and lunged, and Calamity could see people scurrying madly out of the crooked street ahead as the wagon lurched wildly toward them. But that slashing rope across the faces of the leaders, and Calamity's powerful yanking, was beginning to tell.

Several saddle horses at tie rails reared, broke leather reins, and went charging away in terror. Men were shouting, running in panic this way and that, and Calamity could hear the word "dynamite" being yelled by many throats. Then the mules swerved in one last mad attempt to dodge Shorty's flailing rope.

The big wagon crashed into the corner of a porch, and the porch came rocking out into the street in the wake of the huge vehicle. But the lead mules had decided to give up the race, and were skidding on braced legs, eyes rolling and red, mouths sprung wide open by Calamity's powerful heaving on the bits. The big wagon stopped, and Shorty Stevens rode slowly up to the hub, grinning a sickly grin up at his wild-looking pard.

"Gosh, yuh big moose, that took more nerve than I ever knowed one man had," the little cowboy panted. "Calamity, if that fuse had burned down before yuh reached it——"

Shorty gulped, broke off. Calamity swiped a sleeve across his sweating, dust-streaked face, and the bloodhound expression settled over him like a mask.

"This hyar stuff will likely explode yet," he said mournfully. "A feller with my awful luck can't expect

nothin' but plumb awful things to happen. I'll bet there's other fuses in this stuff thet I didn't find."

Calamity almost grinned at the way Shorty Stevens jumped and began staring at the dynamite cases. But there were no more smoking fuses in sight, and Shorty was about to tell his pard a thing or two when townsmen came boiling around them and the wagon, brandishing clubs, guns and all sorts of weapons.

"Yuh blasted fools throw up yore hands!" a gaunt, stoop-shouldered, white-maned old hombre squalled, leveling a shotgun.

Shorty and Calamity blinked, for fully a dozen guns were now covering them.

"We've got yuh murderin' wallopers dead to rights this time," the white-haired old hombre yelled. "Where's young Sam Harper, who is supposed to be drivin' that wagon? An' what was the idea in lettin' them mules run away with a load o' dynamite? If that stuff had let go this town would be blowed to the moon."

"Hold on, ol'-timer," Shorty Stevens clipped. "Yuh've got yore loop twisted, yuh an' these others."

"It ain't no use, Shorty," Calamity said hoarsely, and raised his hands. "These fellers have got me, an' I kin see they aim to kill me slow an' awful fer what I've did. The signs has allus been agin' me, an' this is muh finish."

"Yuh jaspers listen to me!" Shorty Stevens snarled, as the mob started a slow, dangerous forward movement.

In shrill, biting tones, Shorty told the whole story, beginning with the bushwhacking of the young hombre who drove the wagon, and ending with a vivid yet accurate account of the risk Calamity Boggs had run in getting that burning fuse out of the case of dynamite.

The townsmen were staring in thunderstruck silence, their faces white and twitching as the full meaning of Shorty's words sank home. The little puncher stopped to glare at the silenced throng and to catch his breath at the same time.

"An' now," he went on after a moment, "yuh jaspers want to thank Calamity fer what he done by callin' him names an' notchin' yore sights on him. This whole load o' dynamite would 'a' gone wham right in the middle o' this town if it hadn't been fer Calamity."

"The boy is right, men," a hoarse voice called. "My gosh, we could all see that these two strangers was doin' everything they could to stop them runaway mules."

Guns lowered swiftly. Clubs, pitchforks, and an assortment of axes and other hastily gathered weapons disappeared as if by magic. The gaunt old hombre who had spoken first handed his shotgun to another man, and stepped up on the wagon hub, lean hand outstretched toward Calamity Boggs.

"Son, I'm sorry fer the way me an' the others acted," he said hoarsely. "But we'll make it up to you an' yore pard, somehow. I'm Morg Tutt, sort o' head boss o' this town, an' these men follered me here into Misery Basin to settle. I want——"

The voice of old Morg Tutt broke off, for shod hoofs were suddenly beating dull thunder from the upper end of the street. Shorty and Calamity glanced around, and both jumped as if prodded with hot irons. Coming into the town at a hard canter were four riders.

"Hyar comes Chad Meecham an' three o' his men," some hombre called loudly. "I'll bet Mr. Meecham will be glad to help us thank these two cowpokes."

"Meecham an' his men are a mite hard boiled, but they're all square shooters, seems like," Morg Tutt nodded. "Shore, they'll be glad to help us figger out some way o' honorin' these two fellers who saved the lives o' women an' children as well as the lives o' us fellers standin' here."

Shorty Stevens and Calamity Boggs heard what was said, yet their eyes were on the four approaching horsemen. And both Shorty and his big, gloomy pard were as tense as coiled steel, for they recognized two of those oncoming riders as the two bushwhackers who had killed the young driver out on the slopes above the town and started a wagon load of death down the grade behind four stampeding mules.

III.

Shorty Stevens wished violently that he had never looked up at Calamity to see how the big waddy was taking this new development. For the moment Shorty glanced up, Calamity passed him a signal which meant to keep a very tight lip.

Shorty fumed and faunched inwardly, and felt like ignoring Calamity's well-known sign for complete silence. But even in his moment of simmering temper, Shorty Stevens knew well enough it was best to let the smooth-brained Calamity handle the situation.

The four riders were reining in now, and their eyes were on Calamity and Shorty instead of the townsmen who were calling greetings and shouting news.

"Mr. Meecham, these two men saved this town an' the lives of every woman, man, an' youngster in it," old Morg Tutt called shrilly above the other voices.

In that same shrill voice, Tutt repeated almost word for word the story Shorty Stevens had told.

Shorty and Calamity watched the husky, red-necked, green-eyed jasper who was being addressed as Meecham. They watched Meecham's thick, out-turning lips twist into a bitter snarl, and watched his little green eyes take on a poisonous look as he listened.

Meecham's coarse-skinned face was a brutal, savage mask, and the white ring about his ugly mouth spoke eloquently of a rage that was boiling within him. But old Tutt and the other Vista citizens seemed not to notice the deadly look in his eyes and the rage that twisted his face.

Tutt asked the names of Shorty and Calamity, then introduced them proudly to Meecham and the other three murderous-looking jaspers.

"Funeral" Thorp was a gaunt, frozen-faced jasper, with the darting black eyes of a snake, a thin, pointed nose, and a mouth that lay like a thin, red scar against the brown skin of his face.

Then old Morg Tutt introduced Dick Hamble, a slim-waisted, hatchet-faced jasper who wore a black-and-white-checkered shirt and a big, brown Stetson that was very new. Shorty could barely keep from snarling "Bushwhacker!" at the slit-eyed Hamble.

The fourth hombre was introduced as "Blinky" Fargo, and even Calamity Boggs could barely keep from losing his temper when he looked down into Fargo's sharp-chinned face and pale, swiftly blinking eyes. Fargo wore a bright-yellow shirt and a greasy black Stetson, and both Shorty and Calamity remembered how they had watched the slinky, rat-faced fellow come out of the brush carrying a rifle with which he had unquestionably mur-

dered young Sam Harper, the wagon driver.

"Now some o' yuh fellers take this wagon load o' dynamite up to the workin's," Tutt called when the introductions were over. "Speer, yuh an' Duke hook up a rig an' go after poor Sam Harper's remains. Me an' Mr. Meecham will figger out some way to reward Boggs an' Stevens in the meantime."

"Heroes, huh?" Chad Meecham snarled through set teeth at Calamity and Shorty. "Well, if I had my say, Tutt, I'd advise givin' these two saddle tramps a swift kick an' sendin' 'em on their way. I ain't got no use fer nosey, smart-Alecky bums like them."

"But these boys saved this town!" Morg Tutt cried in amazement. "An' yuh've got no call to——"

"Fergit that," Mecham snapped. "What I want to know is what yuh fellers up here are doin' with all this dynamite in the wagon."

Meecham's three hirelings pressed closer, their faces straining as they waited eagerly for an answer. But not until he had climbed down from the wagon, waited until Shorty and Calamity were beside him, then led the way into a small building which housed the Vista Saloon did Morg Tutt explain about that dynamite.

The tiny room was packed with townsmen who were more than eager to be friendly with Shorty and Calamity. But those two gun-wise waddies kept clear of talkative jaspers and stuck close to Morg Tutt and Chad Meecham.

Meecham's three gun-hung followers glowered and sneered at Shorty and Calamity and watched the pair out of narrowed, smoldering eyes. But none of Vista's citizens seemed to sense anything amiss as old Tutt faced Meecham. Tutt was smiling like a man who has just uncovered a fortune in raw gold, and his faded old eyes were a little misty with sheer happiness.

"Mr. Meecham, we've found it at last," he cried in a ringing voice.

A hush fell over the room instantly, and Calamity saw that every Vista man was smiling a happy, bright smile. But Meecham and his three hirelings certainly were not smiling. The four cutthroats were standing tensely alert, hands hanging mighty close to gun butts.

"What are yuh yammerin' about, Tutt?" Meecham snarled. "Cut out this foolishness, whatever it is, an' talk sense. I ain't got but a few minutes to stay here. I rode over to tell yuh that I'll give yuh an' these others that have gone bust in this sink exactly two hundred dollars apiece fer yore holdin's. I will pay cash, an' yuh fools better take it while——"

"Mr. Meecham, we've found the slide that blocked Frio Crick at the head an' stopped the flow o' water!" Morg Tutt cried with ringing happiness in his voice. "That's why we sent fer that dynamite so's we can shoot away the last blockade, and let the old stream bed which sliced plumb through this basin fill with water as it was thirty years ago. An' with that water——"

"Yo're crazy!" Chad Meecham bawled hoarsely. "Yuh ol' fool, Frio Crick went dry ten years ago, an' ain't run a drop o' water except in rainy weather since that time."

"It went dry because a slide buried the big water vein at the head o' the crick," Tutt laughed. "An' we found that buried vein. We know we're right, Meecham, fer water is seepin' out through the rocks where we cleared away most o' the dirt. A few heavy shots o' powder, an' Frio Crick will run as full o' water as it ever did."

"With that much water, yuh blasted sod-bustin' nesters will take root an' stay here," Meecham panted. "Dang ol' Fog Stacy's hide, he sold yuh skunks this land jist to spite me in the first place!"

"Better watch yore tongue, Meecham," Tutt warned sharply. "Us men here bought an' paid fer this land, an' we've got a right to stay an' work if we like. Besides, most o' us are stockmen. If we've got the soil an' water to raise our own feed, that's our good luck."

"Yo're a bunch o' squatters, that's what," raged Meecham. "Stacy put yuh here next to my range, so's yuh'd steal my Walkin' M beef when yuh found yoreselves starvin'. But I'll not have it, yuh hear? I'm buyin' yuh out, so make up yore minds to that."

"An' won't Fog Stacy an' his Lazy S gang o' thieves have big fits an' little uns when they find out that this basin is valuable ag'in," Funeral Thorp chuckled coldly. "Boss, when yuh git control o' this basin' an' open up Frio Crick ag'in, it'll be one o' the sweetest ranges in this country."

"We've stood about enough off yuh Walkin' M fellers!" a husky hombre called grimly. "Better clear out o' town an' cool off afore yuh start somethin' yuh can't stop. None o' us are sellin' our places, an' that's final."

An ugly rumble of voices ran around the room, and Chad Meecham looked as if he were strangling. But the Walking M owner saw that this was no time to argue matters, and passed his three hirelings a quick signal.

"Yuh sod busters will change yore minds," he said ominously. "Right now, I've got business elsewhere."

"I'm already dyin' from the awful skeer I got when I see thet wagon was loaded with dynamite an' a fuse was ready to set the hull works off," Calamity Boggs moaned hoarsely. "But I've got to say somethin' to Mr. Meecham, an' I'll bet him an' his punchers shoot me through the stomach so's I'll die even wuss than I'm dyin' now."

Meecham and his three hirelings blinked at Calamity, their stares saying plainly that they considered him completely loco.

"There ain't nothin' yuh can say to me that I'd be interested in," Meecham finally growled.

"I jist wanted to ask yuh a question," Calamity said, so meekly that Shorty wanted to kick the big waddy's shins for him.

"Well, what is it yuh want?" Meecham sneered. "Anybody as dumb as yuh look an' sound couldn't have much on his mind."

"Don't yuh think," Calamity said slowly, "that yuh an' yore pards ought to go back to thet spot on the road whar Sam Harper was killed an' blot out sign? Blinky Fargo an' Dick Hamble was bound to leave boot tracks whar they squatted in the bresh an' waited fer thet wagon to come along. Blinky's rifle, the one he shot Harper through the back with, ain't an ordinary .30-30 like most everybody else packs. What if Blinky left thet shell up thar? Somebody might git wise that yuh had yore two punchers drill Harper, if yuh don't git rid o' thet sign."

IV.

A tomb could have been no more quiet than the Vista Saloon after Calamity's slow, grim voice pinched off. And no four ghosts could have been any whiter than Chad Meecham and his three hirelings as they stood staring in speechless amazement at Calamity Boggs.

But Shorty Stevens could hold his

tongue no longer. The little waddy grinned from ear to ear, eased out away from the bar, and waved one chubby hand at the goggle-eyed townsmen who were trying to understand what was going on about them.

"Better back up, gents," Shorty said crisply. "When Meecham collects his wits he might think he was tough enough to shoot his way out o' this mess he's in. In that case yuh gents better be out o' line."

The townsmen still did not understand fully just why Meecham and his companions looked as if they were ready to keel over from surprise and uneasiness. But those townsmen did understand what Shorty hinted at about flying lead, and began a hasty, shuffling backstepping that carried them crowded and jammed against the far wall.

Old Morg Tutt, puckered eyes probing, moved back and sidewise, getting in the clear.

"What—what are yuh talkin' about, yuh locoed fool?" Meecham croaked finally, green eyes beginning to blaze as he glowered at Calamity.

"Why, I'm talkin' about how them two punchers yuh sent up yonder on the road to bushwhack a unarmed boy done their job," Calamity shrugged calmly. "An' what I said about thet rifle still goes. Blinky Fargo's neck will land in a noose, if he jacked thet shell out up there an' let somebody find it an' match it with his rifle. I—— Ah-huh!"

Calamity's last word came in a grunting, hoarse sound, for he had seen Blinky Fargo jam a shaking, clawlike hand into a pocket, then yank the hand out, clenched. Calamity waited until Blinky looked down, opened the hand slightly, as if to make absolutely sure of what he held.

As Calamity grunted his vast satisfaction, his own huge right hand flicked out with amazing speed, to snatch a slim, bottle-necked brass cartridge from Blinky's skinny fist. Blinky squalled like a cougar cub, snatched frantically at the disappearing shell.

"Gimme that, yuh locoed walloper!" the little killer squealed. "Hand that back or——"

But a roar of voices lifted, for those Vista hombres knew the score at last and realized that big, dumb-acting Calamity Boggs had tricked a bushwhacker into something resembling a confession. And if the Vista men needed any further proof, it was furnished by Chad Meecham, who cursed Blinky Fargo for a blundering fool. Then things happened so swiftly that the Vista hombres were left gaping and staring.

"Gun them two!" Chad Meecham bawled. "Boys, if we don't smoke our way out o' here pronto——"

Meecham's words were drowned by the blare of his own guns as he drew and fired over the tops of tied-down holsters. Calamity Boggs rocked back on his heels, crimson spurting from his left cheek. No one had seen the big waddy draw, but there was a Colt in his huge right hand, and the pencil of flame which leaped from the gun seemed actually to touch the stiff, murderous face of Funeral Thorp, who had charged in for a close shot.

Thorp wasted a pair of slugs into the floor, smashed sidewise against the bar, and made a limp and lifeless heap.

But Thorp was not alone on the floor. Shorty Stevens, a gun bucking in each hand, was whooping and thumbing lead in a blaring, stuttering roar of sound as he hopped painfully about on one leg. His left leg was numb, and there was a red smear on the thigh where a bullet had cut

deeply into the flesh. And now Shorty stopped, a snarl on his lips, as he saw Blinky Fargo scooting toward the far end of the bar.

Blinky whirled, looked back, and flung up twin guns, screaming curses as he lined the sights. Shorty let both gun hammers drop, and saw Fargo's evil head rock violently on the killer's skinny neck. But even as the bushwhacker slid down in death, Shorty saw something that brought a cry of alarm from him. Calamity Boggs was pitching forward, and he fell into the smoke of Chad Meecham's spitting guns.

Meecham leaped aside, a snarling, rage-maddened killer who would stop at nothing now. Meecham's smoking guns swerved, and a horrible grin twisted his thick lips as he aimed them down through their own smoke at Calamity Boggs.

Shorty Stevens let gun hammers fall—and cried out sharply when his guns gave nothing but dull, dead clicks. Shorty tried to lurch forward, aiming to club at Meecham's head with those empty weapons. But the wounded leg bothered him a lot, and he was still several paces short of his goal when a thin, pale streak of fire slanted up from the floor, and Chad Meecham's big body slued sidewise.

Meecham coughed crimson, choked one gurgling, throaty oath, and died before he hit the floor on his back, cocked guns falling from limp fingers. Then men were rushing forward, to help Shorty over to the bar, and to lift Calamity Boggs up gently.

"Leave me be," Shorty choked. "I ain't more than nicked a little. But Calamity is hit bad. If he wasn't——"

"I'm a goner, pard," Calamity's mournful voice cut in. "Bury me some place in the bresh an' don't tell nobody whar the grave is. I'm a disgrace to my family an' friends."

"Hot diggity!" Shorty whooped.

Many startled and accusing eyes were turned on Shorty for his jubilant outburst. The little waddy grinned and winked broadly at the surprised crowd.

"Yuh seem pretty danged callous, young feller," old Morg Tutt snapped testily.

"Heck, I was plumb worried ontil I heard that big moose start spoutin' gloom," Shorty said cheerfully. "If you gents knowed Calamity as well as I do, yuh'd know that as long as he moans an' bellyaches he's as fit as a fiddle."

"This is turrible," Calamity gasped. "Hyar I'm dyin' o' awful wounds, an' my pard has went back on me an' is makin' fun o' me at the last. But the signs has allus been agin' me, boys, so what else could I——"

"Put that gun down, Chad Meecham!" Shorty yelled shrilly. "If yuh don't——"

Shorty's voice ended in shrill laughter. Four hombres who had been trying to help Calamity up from the floor went spinning wildly aside, and Calamity was on his feet, a cocked Colt in his right hand, keen eyes raking the room.

Chad Meecham lay, of course, just as he had fallen. And suddenly the crowd saw that Shorty had simply wanted to prove to them that Calamity was a faker. Laughter lifted to a roar, while Calamity turned beet-red, grinned ruefully, and felt tenderly of a gash across his ribs.

"But I'll die yet, yuh wait an' see," he prophesied mournfully. "This hyar cut on my face is gittin' screw worms an' gangrene right now. An' this lung shot is ebbin' my strength fast. This is trail's end."

Bitterroot Gun Hawks

A "Circle J" Novelette

By Cleve Endicott

Author of "Flame And Guns On Rattler Flats," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THREE ORNERY HOMBRES.

THE two scrawny roan horses that were pulling the weather-beaten wagon stopped dead in their tracks, snorting uneasily. There on the seat of the light wagon sat a small, white-haired woman, staring in terror at the three riders who had spurred suddenly out into the rutted road and halted her team.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Bailey," one of the riders called sneeringly. "Yuh out takin' a drive fer yore health?"

The speaker was a big, powerfully built man, with thick, curling lips and a pair of evil yellow eyes that blazed hatefully. He lifted a powerful hand as he spoke, shoved his greasy hat far back, and clawed at a tangle of corn-colored hair which crowned his low, bulging forehead.

"I—I had started to town, Mr. Heath," the woman answered tremblingly. "Surely you—you don't mind if I take a trip to town, do you?" she rushed on more swiftly. "I—I simply have to go, Mr. Heath, because——"

"Because yuh've got yore husband, ol' Nelse Bailey, hid under them quilts in the back o' that wagon!" Heath bawled harshly. "Turn this team around, ol' woman, an' head back fer that mangy Block B spread o' yores."

"I can't!" Mrs. Bailey cried in a stricken voice. "My husband is badly hurt, Mr. Heath. I simply must get him to a doctor or——"

"Never mind, ma," came a weak, muffled voice from the bed of the wagon. "Yo're wastin' yore breath talkin' to that snake, Blaze Heath."

The pile of quilts in the bed of the wagon heaved aside, to reveal a small, gnarled old man who lay there on a thick mattress. His face was white and pinched, yet his faded old eyes were steady as he eyed the three men there in the road.

"I got a rifle ball lodged in my right hip, Heath," the old fellow choked out. "Yuh or one o' yore Bar H gang drilled me this mornin' when I stepped out my front door. If I was twenty year younger——"

"Kin yuh *prove* that me or any o' my men done that shootin'?" "Blaze" Heath cut in, and there was a bestial grin on his ugly mouth. He turned to wink at a short, thick-bodied hombre who sat on his left.

The man's thick shoulders lifted in a slight shrug, and his round, swollen paunch quivered in silent mirth.

"I don't know what the ol' coot's talkin' about," he grunted. "Tom Garland, there, he don't know either, eh?"

The short hombre nodded toward the third rider—a lanky, dark-faced man with piercing black eyes and a red gash of a mouth.

Tom Garland's mouth pulled into a twisted grin now, and his slim, long-fingered hands drifted down to caress the butts of twin six-guns that were thonged to his thighs.

"Nope, Pete, I don't know a thing about that shootin'," Garland snickered. "All I know is that Nelse Bailey ought to sell out his Block B an' quit the country afore somebody gits serious about slingin' lead at him."

"Yeah, that'd be the wise thing fer the old fool to do." Blaze Heath nodded his ill-shaped head decisively. "But Bailey's a stubborn ol' fool. He'll——"

"He'll die unless you men get out of the way and let me take him on to town," Mrs. Bailey put in nervously. "Mr. Heath, you surely wouldn't go that far in your fight to get us off our range, would you?"

"If yuh was a man, I'd learn yuh some sense!" Blaze Heath snarled hotly, his big, hairy hands dropping to lift twin guns from the oiled holsters at his thighs.

At sight of the guns, Mrs. Bailey paled, yet she did not cower and cringe. Her steady eyes studied the contorted, evil face of Heath, and her thin, work-hardened hands tightened on the reins until the knuckles showed white.

"I'm quite sure you wouldn't shoot a woman, Mr. Heath," she said steadily. "So please get over the notion that you can bluff me. I'm taking Nelse to town, whether you like it or not."

"Sassy, are yuh?" Heath snarled. "Like yuh say, I won't shoot no woman. But I'll drill those two crowbaits yuh've got hooked to this wagon onless yuh turn 'em around an' head back fer that spread o' yores!"

"Better do what the boss says, ol' woman," Tom Garland warned in a thin, hard voice. "We ain't foolin', and yuh an' that husband o' yores ought ter know it by this time."

The three hombres had drawn their guns now, and were cocking the weapons. Mrs. Bailey went white, shuddering a little as she heard her husband muttering and groaning. She glanced back, to see the wounded man rolling and tossing.

"Turn the team, ma," Nelse Bailey called weakly. "Them dirty snakes will spook the hosses an' yuh'll be hurt. No use in worryin' about me. I'll be—all right."

There were tears in Mrs. Bailey's eyes as she turned back to face the three scowling gunmen who sat blocking the road.

"Please let me take him on to the doctor," she half sobbed. "Mr. Heath, you've wanted our place bad enough to do a lot of mean things to us in the hope you could run us out. Nelse wouldn't sell, and now he may be dying. But if you'll let me

take him on to town, I—I'll talk him into selling out to you."

The tawny eyes of big, burly Blaze Heath flamed greedily, and for a moment there was the hint of a gloating grin at the corners of his thick mouth. But some other thought came swiftly, and his grin changed to a snarl. He swore a half-smothered oath, and leveled both guns at the scrawny team.

"If that ol' coyote yuh call yore husband dies, yuh'll shore sell out," he snarled. "Turn that team, ol' woman, or we'll drop 'em in their tracks. If yuh happen ter think I'm bluffin'——"

"If yuh three mangy skunks think *I'm* bluffin', just wiggle a finger!" came a harsh, gritty voice from directly over the heads of the three mounted gunmen. "Drop them shootin' irons, all o' yuh, afore I let a lot o' good clean sunlight through yore mangy hides!"

Blaze Heath and his two hirelings went stiff. To their ears came the cold *click-click-click* of a single-action Colt hammer rocking to full cock. The trio of toughs shuddered, for there was something ominously final about the metallic sound of that gun hammer rocking back to the last notch.

Blaze Heath went pale. Tom Garland, gun-swift ramrod of Heath's big Bar H spread, crouched slightly forward, his dark skin taking on a sickly color. Pete Serber swore harshly, gripped his guns a little tighter, and grinned as a lobo might grin. He started turning his shaggy head ever so slowly.

From the bluff above the trail came a brittle laugh and the faint tinkle of a spur rowel. "Go ahead, yuh coyote," came that same brittle voice. "Look around, an' I'll drop a bullet smack between yore ornery eyes."

Pete Serber croaked in fear, let his guns thud to the ground, and lifted grimy hands above the brim of his hat. Heath and Garland choked oaths as they hastily dropped their own weapons.

Blaze Heath opened his mouth to say something, but at that moment there came a clatter of crumbling stone from above, a gasp of alarm, and a man's voice lifted in a yelp of terror.

Blaze and his two hirelings spun their mounts toward the sound in time to see a lanky young hombre come skidding helplessly over the rim of the little bluff.

"The fool lost his footin' an' is fallin'!" Heath yelled. "Git yore guns, boys. We'll fix this jasper!"

CHAPTER II.

JOE SCOTT'S ORDERS.

BLAZE HEATH and his two hirelings flung out of their saddles as if moved by the same muscles. They struck the ground on wide-planted boots, each grabbing for his fallen guns.

But before their hands could touch the weapons, a Colt roared and Tom Garland, whose hands were almost covering the butts of his two six-guns, let out a yowl of pain. He leaped back, tripped over his long-shanked spurs, and sat down hard.

"Steady, yuh other two snakes!" came a pained voice from the roadway behind the disgruntled gunmen. "I'm mebbe skinned up a mite, but I'm still able to handle yuh. Leave them guns alone!"

Blaze Heath lurched back away from his weapons, and Pete Serber stood half crouched, arms dangling above his guns, lips moving as he panted oaths.

"Better look out, pards!" Garland gasped. "That cuss nigh blowed my

head off. He means business, Blaze!"

Garland got painfully to his feet, face white and working, crimson dribbling from a half-moon nick in the lobe of his left ear.

Heath and Serber saw that bullet-notched ear, and backed hastily away from their guns. The three Bar H men turned now, hands above their heads.

There at the base of the steeply sloping bluff sat a lanky young hombre with flaming red hair, very large ears, and a face that was liberally sprinkled with large brown freckles.

The redhead held a cocked six-gun trained on the three staring toughs, and he grinned a one-sided grin at them as he felt his big, beaked nose. That beak of a nose was skinned and raw-looking, and the young puncher's red jersey was ripped down one side.

"Bluff give away under me, an' I shore took a header," he grunted, getting slowly to his feet. "But I reckon I still got most o' my hide left."

"Who—who in blazes are yuh, younker?" Heath croaked. "If yo're smart, yuh'll put away that smoke pole an' high-tail it while yo're healthy. Yuh can't mess into my affairs like this an' git by with it, kid. Who are yuh?"

"Scott's my handle—Joe Scott," the red-headed young waddy clipped, his blue eyes smoldering as he eyed the trio. "An' get this through that knob yuh call a head, feller: I'm boss o' this layout right now, an' I'll do the questionin'."

"Scott!" Tom Garland jerked the word out. "Say, ain't yuh one o' them Circle J fellers from up in the Bitterroot country, that's been hangin' around Red Fork town a few days."

"Yeah, I'm one o' the Circle J hands," said Joe Scott. "My boss, Billy West, seen an advertisement Nelse Bailey put in the paper, offerin' some of his Block B stock fer sale at a bargain. Him an' me an' a couple other hands come down here ter——"

"Better keep yore snoot out o' my affairs, Scott!" Blaze Heath snarled. "Know who yo're foolin' with?"

"Please be careful, Mr. Scott!" Mrs. Bailey called suddenly. "These men are—are dangerous. If you don't watch them, they'll kill you for what you're doing to them."

"That so?" Joe Scott called pleasantly, yet he kept his eyes on the Bar H trio. "Shucks, lady, these jaspers don't look so tough. Why was they botherin' yuh, anyhow?"

"My husband, Nelse Bailey, is here in the wagon, badly wounded," the woman answered swiftly. "Blaze Heath and these two men of his were about to force me to turn around and take him home instead of to the doctor at Red Fork."

"I got a rifle ball lodged agin' the bone o' my right hip, son," Nelse Bailey called weakly as he pulled himself up to peer over the wagon bed. "Blaze Heath—the big yaller-eyed one there—or some o' his outfit drilled me this mornin' early. Heath wants me to die off, so's he kin grab my Block B spread."

"So yuh aimed to send a wounded man home to die from blood poisonin', eh?" Joe Scott asked, eyes boring Blaze Heath. "Yuh mangy dang——"

"Say, these two ol' people are loco, Scott," Heath blurted. "Why, my boys an' me jist stopped to ast what was wrong when we seen the ol' man in the bed o' the wagon. We——"

"Yuh pulled yore guns jist to be sociable, eh?" Joe Scott horned in coldly. "Yo're three mighty brave

men, only pullin' two guns apiece when yo're faced with sich odds as these two helpless people in the wagon there."

Under Joe's sarcasm, the faces of the three Bar H men went crimson, then white.

Blaze took a step forward, huge body quivering, tawny eyes ugly with murderous lights.

"All right, Scott," he bit out savagely. "Yuh've got the upper hand now, that's plain. My boys an' me will fork our broncs an' raise dust away from here. But this ain't the last yuh'll hear or see o' us."

"Yuh an' them two heel dawgs with yuh ain't goin' any place right now," Joe Scott said grimly. "Back up, coyotes, so's that wagon can pass."

"Drill them three polecats, Scott," old Nelse Bailey called weakly. "Let 'em loose, an' they'll bushwhack us all afore this wagon can roll to town. If I had that gun yo're holdin' I'd remove them three bushwhackers from the map in a hurry."

Under the threatening muzzle of Joe Scott's six-gun, the three Bar H men had sidled off the road, and were standing with their backs to a steep embankment.

Joe Scott moved out into the center of the road now, gathered up three sets of trailing bridle reins in his free left hand, and backed away, leading the Bar H broncs out of the road.

"All right, Mrs. Bailey," Joe called without looking away from the three fuming gunmen. "Start yore team an' head on fer town. Me an' these jaspers will be along behind yuh, but don't wait fer us."

"I'm afraid for you," the gray-haired woman called uneasily. Can't you tie those men up or something?"

"I'll take care o' these fellers," Joe Scott called cheerfully. "Besides, I want to see yuh an' yore husband after we git to town. My boss, Billy West, sent me out here to look yuh folks up. He seen yore ad in the paper an' wants ter look over the cattle yuh got fer sale."

"Say, yuh an' that West hombre will both pay fer this, Scott!" Blaze Heath roared. "Aimed ter sneak out hyar an' buy dogies from ol' Bailey, huh? I'll learn yuh fools better than ter come meddlin' into my business like that."

"I was comin' up the road when I seen yuh three duck in behind this bend here an' scrooch down in yore saddles like yuh aimed to waylay somebody," Joe Scott snapped. "I took a ride out on top, an' was danged nigh too late to help these folks. I heard yuh three say yuh aimed to kill that team, Heath."

"Next thing yuh hears will be the angels singin', cowboy," Tom Garland snarled. "Yuh've shore put yore name on a tombstone by buttin' in like this."

"Mebbe so." Joe Scott shrugged. "On the other hand, mebbe not. Right now yuh three prize four-flushers ain't in much of a position to argue matters.

"Mrs. Bailey, git yore wagon rollin'," Joe called in a louder voice. "An' don't be oneasy about any more ambushin'. These jaspers will be right busy for the next two-three hours."

"Better take my advice, son, an' drill them three," old Nelse Bailey called from the wagon box. "If yuh turn 'em loose, they'll be onto us with their hull crew."

Mrs. Bailey bit down on quivering lips, then slapped the lines down against the rumps of the sleepy team. The horses stepped forward, the wagon creaking behind them.

When the rig was past, Joe Scott

sidled over to the three Bar H horses, mounted the bronc that belonged to Tom Garland, and grinned down at the staring trio.

"Yuh three," the redhead said flatly, "are takin' a nice long walk. We'll circle out on top o' the ridge, where I left my hoss. Then yuh wallopers will make tracks down the road to Red Fork town."

"Yuh—yuh mean yuh're gonna make us *walk?*" Blaze Heath choked. "Blast yuh, Scott, we'd be the laughin'stock o' this whole country if we was to let yuh herd us into town like sheep! I'll——"

"Yuh'll walk or git drug in by yore own ropes," Joe snarled. "Make up yore minds, yuh mangy snakes, an' do it fast. Either light out o' here like yore heels was on fire, or I'll dab loops onto yuh an' drag yuh to town!"

CHAPTER III.

"WE'LL KILL THEM ALL!"

NO one seemed to notice the rickety little wagon that drew into the outskirts of Red Fork and halted before Doctor Saunders's tree-shaded cottage. Nor was there any interest aroused in the town when old Nelse Bailey was carried from that wagon and into the doctor's house a few minutes later.

Mrs. Bailey sat waiting in the living room of the doctor's home, face pale and drawn, fighting back the tears of grief and terror that came to her eyes. But when the doctor finally stepped from the room which he used as combination office and operating room, Mrs. Bailey was on her feet, an unvoiced question in her eyes. The thin little doctor smiled, guided Mrs. Bailey to a comfortable chair, and seated her.

"No worry at all, Mrs. Bailey," the doctor said kindly. "I gouged that rifle ball out of Nelse's thigh. Clean wound, and the bone was not broken. You rest right here, while I have your team taken care of. Nelse will be asleep for some time yet."

The doctor hurried from the room, a grim look on his lean old face. Nelse Bailey had told him about that wound—how he had got it, whom he suspected of being behind all his troubles.

"Dirty shame!" the doctor muttered, as he walked out into his yard and turned along a path toward the back of the place. "Nelse Bailey and his wife are fine old people, and certainly don't deserve such a blow as this. I'll have a little chat with Sheriff Eli Walton as soon as I can get down to his office."

The doctor halted now, called sharply to an Indian boy who was working on a little corral which held the doctor's own horses.

"John!" the medico called loudly. "Come get the wagon and team out front, will you? Stable and feed the team, then come up to the house and wait there until I return."

The young redskin nodded cheerily and came trotting down the path.

But Doctor Saunders did not wait to give the lad further instructions, for John was a dependable fellow, who would do as told.

The little medico turned back around the house, stamped out the front gate, and headed for the main street of the town, his thin, wiry body swinging along at a brisk gait. The doctor was angry over this thing and meant to have a talk with Sheriff Walton immediately.

But the doctor had barely reached the wide, dusty main street of the town when a great shout went up. He turned sharply and saw men pouring from doorways along both sides of the wide street—men who

stood bunched on the raised wooden sidewalks to stare and point down the street. The doctor turned his gaze to follow the eyes and pointing hands of others, and a quick smile touched his lips.

"Ah!" he breathed. "So that young stranger who Nelse Bailey said helped him and his wife out on the road this morning managed to take care of those Bar H devils, after all!" There was genuine pleasure in the doctor's keen gray eyes as he hurried along the wooden sidewalk.

Into the far end of the street had come three staggering, bedraggled men, who plodded along with the sullenness of hard-driven cattle. And behind those hombres came a lanky young red-headed cowboy, who rode a leggy gray cayuse and led three other horses.

The little doctor chuckled as he saw the end of a lariat rope dangling from the red-headed puncher's freckled left hand.

Voices along the street had become a deep roaring sound now, and men were running along the walks and up the dusty street's center as well.

Blaze Heath, Tom Garland, and Pete Serber halted before the on-sweeping tide of men, and the three weary cutthroats looked as poisonous as coiled rattlesnakes.

"Fer gosh sakes, Blaze, what does this mean?" a big, red-nosed hombre roared, as he halted before the trio of sullen gunmen.

"Shet yore face, Alf Hawley, an' git back ter yore Mecca Saloon where yuh belong!" Blaze Heath bawled. "An' that goes fer the rest o' yuh gawkin' fools. Scatter, yuh hear me? I'll——"

Whap! The Bar H owner's wrathful voice ended in a yowl of pain as the seat of his pants was cut sharply by the end of Joe Scott's lariat rope.

Blaze Heath had started to lurch forward, evidently aiming to vent his anger on Alf Hawley, the big, mean-eyed saloon owner. But Joe Scott's rope stung the meanness out of Heath for the moment.

The hombres who had come rushing down the street to form a big, gawking crowd were backing away now, muttering uneasily as they recognized the three disgruntled jaspers who had been driven into town.

"Don't mind these three footsore specimens o' skunkhood, folks," Joe Scott called loudly, and swiftly explained why he had brought the Bar H men into town. "Round up the sheriff, some one," Joe finished. "I reckon these jaspers will git locked up a spell, at least."

"Lies!" Blaze Heath almost screamed the words. "Me an' these boys never bothered ol' Nelse Bailey a-tall. This red-headed young fool will shore git——"

"Say, what is this? Joe, what in thunder are you up to?" The words came in a clear, crisp voice that caused many eyes to turn upon the husky-shouldered, medium-sized young waddy who had pushed through the crowd and was stalking toward Joe Scott.

That husky-shouldered youth was Billy West, boss and half owner of the big Circle J Ranch, which lay in the foothills of the Bitterroot Mountains.

Joe Scott's freckled face flushed a little, and his blue eyes searched the rugged face of his boss swiftly. Billy's gray eyes were a little angry-looking, and there was a firm set to his wide lips.

"I—I had to take these three snakes in hand, Billy," Joe Scott growled, and explained quickly.

Billy West's batwing chaps flapped as he spun so swiftly that the tails of his spotted calfskin vest stood out at his sides like stubby

wings. There was a commotion going on in the crowd, and Billy heard a raucous, familiar voice lifting in wild anger.

"So thet's how yuh tends ter business, is it, Joe Scott?" that bawling voice asked. "By heifers, yuh young gopher, Billy an' me can't trust yuh a-tall. What in tarnation am yuh doin' ter these pore fellers?"

The crowd was being scattered like quail by a lanky old waddy who had a long, grizzled cowhorn mustache and a pair of bulging brown eyes that blazed out fiercely from beneath shaggy gray brows. The old waddy was "Buck" Foster, one of Circle J's top hands.

"Say, who asked yuh to poke that bent nose o' yores into this, Hoss-face?" Joe Scott yipped.

Those two were, at heart, the firmest of friends. But they wrangled constantly, each apparently trying to think up some new way of insulting the other.

Billy West saw now that there would be a jawing match in progress pronto, and decided to nip the fuss in the bud.

"All right, Joe, that's enough out o' yuh," Billy warned, then turned to face Buck, who had finally won through the crowd and was standing glowering up at Joe Scott.

"Hoss-face, am I?" Buck roared at Joe. "Yuh spotty-faced young leppy, I'll—— Waal, I'll be a horned toad!"

Joe Scott shuddered suddenly, and a red smear appeared as if by magic on the side of his face. Then Joe was falling, as the harsh bark of a rifle floated in from somewhere down the street.

Billy West yelled in dismay, and tried to catch Joe as the redhead fell. He succeeded partially, and his strong arms broke Joe's fall considerably. Billy was white beneath his tan, and his hands shook as he lowered his saddle pard to the dusty street.

Joe's hat had rolled off, and his red hair was redder now with the crimson flow that came from along the side of his head.

"Daid!" Buck Foster roared hoarsely. "Some low-down bushwhacker kilt me pard! After thet bushwhacker, men! Jist corral him, an' let me have the snake."

In the wild confusion which followed, no one noticed Blaze Heath, Tom Garland, and Pete Serber as the evil trio slunk away into the crowd. As they slunk away, they were grinning slyly.

"Alf Hawley drilled that redheaded snake!" Blaze Heath rasped, when he and his two footsore companions were beyond the crowd. "Alf give me the wink an' faded back out o' sight. He got that Scott snake, an' afore the sun sets, we'll git them other meddlin' fools, an' Nelse Bailey, too."

"Yeah, we'd better kill those other hombres," Serber snarled viciously. "If we don't, they'll make trouble for us, shore."

"The blasted snakes aim ter buy cattle from Nelse Bailey, which would 'a' give the ol' fool money ter hire gun-slingers with!" rasped Blaze. "Fer that, we're killin' West, that gray-muzzled Foster, an' even that chink cook o' theirs. Nobody messes up my business an' gits by with it!"

CHAPTER IV.

BAR H PLANS.

DOCTOR SAUNDERS grinned for the second time that morning after attending to a patient. His patient was Joe Scott this time, and Joe was wiping tears from his eyes and trying to grin.

The redhead had been carried into

a pool hall, propped up in a chair, and told bluntly by the little doctor to expect some pain. There was an ugly gash along the left side of Joe's head, a gash that was now closed by four stitches. The sting of the needle through his scalp and the burn of the antiseptic with which the doctor had washed out the gash brought tears to Joe's eyes, yet the redhead had made no fuss about it.

"Gosh, doc, what did yuh use to sew up that cut, bailin' wire?" Joe grinned weakly up at the little medico. "Whatever it was, it shore hurt."

"You're lucky, young man, to be able to fuss about the sting of those stitches," the doctor said wearily. "A half inch to the right, and that slug would have ripped your skull wide open."

Joe nodded, eyes raking the ring of faces about him. He was about to ask for his pards when a small Chinaman came shoving through the crowd.

The Chinaman's round face was a shade or two lighter than usual, and his almond-shaped eyes held a frightened look until he saw that Joe Scott was all right.

"Somebody jus' now tell me you get hurt, Mistlee Joe," the little chink jabbered in pidgin English. "You betta now, though."

That little Chinaman was Sing Lo, Circle J's cook and handy man. Sing Lo was mighty good at dressing wounds himself, for he possessed more than the average man's knowledge of drugs and crude surgery. The little fellow came up to Joe, looked at the scalp wound, and nodded approvingly.

"Doctah do velly good job," Sing Lo said solemnly. "You head get well quick now. So be."

"Where's Billy an' Buck?" Joe asked quickly. "An' just what happened to me, anyhow?"

Willing voices explained what had happened—how a bullet had come winging from somewhere down the street to knock Joe from his horse.

"But I don't know where your two friends went," Doctor Saunders finished explaining. "The old fellow went tearing toward the sound of that shot. After you were in here, and I started to work, West disappeared. Perhaps——"

The doctor broke off, for through the pool-hall door trooped three men.

Two of them were Billy West and Buck Foster.

The third was a lean old hombre, with hard gray eyes, a mouth like a steel trap, and two black-butted guns thonged to saddle-warped thongs. On the old hombre's flapping vest front was a big five-pointed star, with "Sheriff" lettered across it in black.

"That him there?" the hard-eyed sheriff jerked out, pointing a lean, bony hand toward Joe Scott.

"Yeah, sheriff, that's Joe Scott," Billy West answered. "Joe, meet Sheriff Eli Walton. The sheriff wants to know a few things about why yuh brought them Bar H jaspers into town like yuh done."

"Whar am the crooks now?" Buck Foster roared, as the sheriff and Joe eyed each other coolly.

"In the excitement, Buck, we all forgot them wallopers," Billy explained tensely. "I dodged back outside to see if I could find 'em, but they was gone."

Joe shuttled a glance at Billy West. Billy's gray eyes were puckered a little at the corners, his mouth looked tight, and there was an angry tilt to his dark-thatched head.

Billy was angry, yet was very plainly holding that anger down. And Joe Scott needed no one to tell

him that Billy and the sheriff had probably locked horns.

"Waal, are you tongue-tied?" the sheriff snarled suddenly.

Joe Scott stiffened, a flush replacing the pallor of his freckled face.

"No, I ain't tongue-tied, sheriff," the redhead replied coolly. "Nor I ain't deef, so don't bother about shoutin' at me."

The sheriff's lean old face flushed, and his bony hands swung close to his black gun butts.

"Young feller," the sheriff rasped, "yuh humiliated one o' the county's most influential citizens when yuh marched Blaze Heath into town like a side-lined dogie. D'yuh aim to explain any, or do I slap yuh in jail to see what Blaze wants done with yuh?"

"Steady, Joe!" Billy West called quickly. "Tell the sheriff why yuh brought them wallopers in like yuh done. An' don't worry about gettin' in any jail."

The sheriff turned to snarl something at Billy, but decided to hold his counsel.

Billy's level gaze and calm manner puzzled the sheriff, and the officer glanced back at Joe, who had begun talking.

Joe told his story simply and swiftly, blue eyes growing hot as he recalled the brutal tactics of those Bar H men.

"So I rounded the snakes up, pointed 'em down the trail, an' herded 'em in here," Joe finished harshly. "Whether they're personal friends o' yores or not don't bother me, sheriff. I'd do the same thing over again if the play come up that way."

"Yuh got any proof o' this crazy yarn?" the sheriff growled, eying Joe hotly.

"If I had them three here, I could make 'em talk," Joe rapped out. "But some personal friend o' theirs tried to blow my head off, an' I reckon they've vamosed."

That gibe about some personal friend of the three gunmen having done the bushwhacking would certainly have started a row but for Doctor Saunders's interruption.

The little medico stepped forward, grasped the sheriff's lean right arm, and spun the officer around.

"Keep your shirt on, Eli," the medico snapped. "I dug a rifle ball out of Nelse Bailey's thigh, a while ago, so I rather believe this youngster is telling the truth about the whole matter. Mrs. Bailey certainly backs his story up, and so does Nelse. Better go easy, Eli."

With that, the doctor turned away, to leave the sheriff scowling and thoughtful.

"I'd like to ketch Blaze Heath an' them two pet gunnies o' his at some sich trick!" the old officer blurted finally. "I'll go round 'em up an' ask——"

"No need o' that, sheriff," came a gloating voice from the doorway.

All eyes turned, to see Heath, Garland, and Serber standing just outside, grinning evilly.

The ornery jaspers had washed most of the trail dust from their faces, and showed signs of having used something pretty strong to cut the alkali from their throats.

The sheriff snarled something and made for the door, the Circle J pards and Doctor Saunders close behind him. When they stepped outside, the sheriff's hands were clamped to his gun butts, and there was a grim set to his hard mouth.

"All right, Heath, what have yuh got to say for yoreself?" the sheriff demanded.

Blaze Heath grinned, tawny eyes flashing to the faces of his two companions. Then the Bar H owner so-

bered, forced a look of concern to cross his evil face.

"Sheriff, me an' the boys come hyar ter tell yuh how wrong we was," Heath explained. "We seen Mrs. Bailey fetchin' her old man ter town, an' figgered the ol' loafer was on a drunk."

"That's gospel, sheriff," Tom Garland put in. "Us fellers made a lot o' boogery talk, jist ter see if we couldn't scare ol' Nelse Bailey into crawlin' out o' that wagon an' makin' a run fer it. We—we never knowed he was shore enough hurt, sheriff."

"I'll say we didn't," Blaze Heath boomed. "Why, me an' the boys was plumb broke up, sheriff, when we heard that pore ol' Nelse Bailey was really hurt. We jist aimed ter have a little fun, thinkin' he was soused. We're shore mighty sorry about——"

The yellow-eyed jasper got no further. Heels clicked on the board walk, and Mrs. Bailey, pale and shaken, came forward to clutch at the doctor's arm.

"Come quick, doctor!" the woman cried. "Nelse is getting up. I—I can't stop him. He says we must get back to the ranch."

"What's the matter with that man?" the doctor growled. "Why, he'll open that wound and have it flowing the moment he tries to walk!"

"Nelse says we've simply got to get back to the ranch," Mrs. Bailey said wearily. "You see, doctor, we had a bunch of cattle rounded up, ready to sell in case a Mr. West, who'd answered our ad, wanted them. And there's no one on the ranch now to guard those cattle."

The doctor turned quickly, and introduced Billy West, Buck Foster, and Sing Lo to Mrs. Bailey. And while the Circle J pards were thus engaged for the moment, Blaze Heath nudged his two companions and sidled away.

"Quick!" the tawny-eyed rancher hissed. "If we git out ter Bailey's Block B an' grab them cattle, we've got the ol' cuss licked fer fair."

"Grabbin' them dogies will be a cinch," snickered Garland as the evil trio moved farther away. "If there's nobody out thar to guard the critters, we kin have 'em run off afore dusk."

CHAPTER V.

AMBUSH.

SHERIFF WALTON and the Circle J pards followed Doctor Saunders and Mrs. Bailey back to the doctor's cottage. They found old Nelse Bailey sitting on the edge of a bed where the doctor had put him, trying weakly to dress himself.

Nelse Bailey swore and pleaded by turns when the doctor told him sternly to get back into bed, and wound up finally by hurling a boot at the medico.

But Nelse was weak, and could offer little resistance when Doctor Saunders and Billy West grasped him gently but firmly and stretched him out beneath crisp white sheets.

"You'd open that wound and be in a bad condition, Nelse, if you were fool enough to try getting up now," the doctor said quietly. "Quit acting like a spoiled kid, and behave yourself. In a week or so——"

"Week or so?" the wounded man panted. "Doc, I've got to get back home, I tell yuh. Why, unless I'm there to look out for my stuff, that blasted Blaze Heath an' his scorpions will strip my range of what few dogies they ain't already stole from me."

"That's strong talk, Nelse," the hard-eyed sheriff said sourly. "Got

any proof that Blaze Heath ever stole any stuff from yuh?"

"Proof?" Bailey howled. "Dang yuh, Walton, I've told yuh a dozen times that Blaze Heath was stealin' me blind. I've follered the sign of my stolen Block B critters onto his Bar H range. I've seem him an' his thievin' pack scoutin' around my range. I've——"

"Yuh've got no proof," the sheriff cut in coldly. "Ontil yuh can give me concrete proof, Nelse, I can't do a thing."

The officer turned on his heel and stalked from the room, muttering under his breath.

"Say, thet blasted tin-star am in with the rustlers!" Buck Foster snorted through his bent nose.

"Don't fool yoreself, feller," Nelse Bailey gritted. "Eli is as square as they come an' hates Blaze Heath like poison. But he can't go around arrestin' folks without danged good cause."

Doctor Saunders introduced Billy West, Buck Foster, and Sing Lo to the sick man, and quickly turned the topic of conversation to the cattle which Joe Scott had started out that morning to see.

The little medico was hoping that a discussion of cattle and prices might cheer up his patient. But at mention of the stock, Nelse Bailey's face became grimmer than ever, and his knotty hands clenched down on the covers.

"Dang it, I'm ruined, I tell yuh!" the old fellow choked. "West, there's nobody out there at my place to protect that herd o' cattle, so yuh may as well look elsewhere fer some to buy."

"Yuh seem pretty sure that Heath will take 'em." Billy shrugged. "But mebbe he'll not go quite that strong, Bailey."

"That skunk or some o' his men tried to kill me this mornin' when I stepped out my front door," the old rancher said thinly. "They want that place o' mine, West, because the water on it never peters out, an' the range is good winter range. They'll steal them cattle o' mine afore night."

Billy West glanced up to meet Joe Scott's steady gaze. Billy's wide lips quirked the least bit at the corners, and Joe Scott's freckled face broke into a grin.

"Bet we're thinkin' the same thing, Billy," the redhead chuckled, rubbing a thumb along the lobe of one big bat ear.

Billy nodded, then turned to look back at old Nelse Bailey. "The doctor says yuh've got to stay here in bed a week or more, Bailey," he said quietly. "Suppose yuh do that, an' quit frettin' like yuh are. An' while yo're lettin' that wound heel, my pards an' me will sort of amble out to yore place an' stick around."

"Jist what I was about ter say!" Buck Foster grinned a snaggle-toothed grin. "An' if yuh want ter see a bunch o' rustler hides on the fence, jist let them Bar H snakes come nosin' around. We'll——"

"Yuh—yuh can't do that, West," Nelse Bailey spoke hoarsely.

"An' why not?" the Circle J boss demanded. "What's wrong with us goin' out to yore place an' makin' ourselves to home for a while?"

"I—I ain't got a cent to pay yuh with," the Block B owner said wearily. "An' besides that, West, yuh an' yore men would be jumped by them Bar H snakes the minute they found yuh there."

"Who said anything about wantin' pay?" Billy clipped. "Bailey, this is just a case o' one rancher loanin' another rancher a hand when a hand is needed. As for them neighbors o'

yores jumpin' us—waal, Circle J ain't apt to booger easy."

Old Nelse Bailey tried to say something, but his voice seemed choked, and he turned his head quickly aside. "Thanks, West!" he muttered thickly.

"Yuh stay in bed and let the doctor get yuh well again," Billy called cheerfully. "An' in the meantime, don't worry about yore spread. I reckon these knot-headed cowpokes o' mine an' me can take care o' things out at the Block B ontil yuh get back."

Billy West turned then, his pards falling in behind him as he made for the door.

Mrs. Bailey and the doctor followed them out onto the porch, where the Circle J boss had an awkward moment while Mrs. Bailey tried to thank him for what he was doing.

Then Billy and his pards were down the steps and heading out the yard gate. They swung across the town's edge to a livery and feed corral, where their mounts, except Joe Scott's, were stabled.

"I'll git my bronc from down the street yonder an' be here by the time yuh jaspers git saddled up," Joe called, and trotted away.

Billy whistled to a big, powerfully built chestnut bronc that was in the corral, and the horse followed like a pet dog to the saddle shed.

Buck Foster caught a chunky black, while Sing Lo got a sleepy-looking little piebald cayuse and began saddling hurriedly.

"Looks like we've got to do a little range ridin', Danger hoss," Billy talked to the big chestnut he was saddling. "Ol' Nelse Bailey shore needs some help right now, an' I reckon us Montana hombres got to do the helpin'."

Danger whinnied softly, and reached back to nip playfully at his master. Then Billy was clumping toward the barn office, where a frowzy-looking little hombre stood blinking owlishly at him.

"Yuh fellers leavin', too, huh?" the barn keeper grumbled. "Dang it, I thought mebbe yuh'd be around a few days, anyhow. Business is pore right now, an' I like to hang onto my customers long as I kin."

Billy counted out what he owed the man for taking care of the Circle J horses, and handed the money over.

"Too bad, amigo," the Circle J boss said. "But looks like we'll have to take our broncs an' drift along."

"Yeah, that's what Mr. Heath an' all his men done, too," the stable owner complained, pocketing the money Billy had given him. "They headed out o' here in a big rush, an' I heard 'em sayin' somethin' about drivin' a bunch o' cattle off some place afore it got too dark. I—— Huh!"

The stable owner broke off in disgust, for Billy West had whirled, mounted Danger, and was spurring across the corral. Billy called and turned into a well-defined trail that led north from the town.

"That gabby stable keeper says Blaze Heath an' a bunch o' other hombres who work for Heath left town in a hurry!" Billy told his pards swiftly. "Accordin' to the stableman, Heath an' his outfit were headin' some place to make a cattle drive before dark."

"Say, yuh reckon them snakes are aimin' to jump the Block B herd like ol' Nelse Bailey figgered they would?" Joe Scott asked quickly.

Billy nodded grimly. "I'd bet sound money on that. But if we hustle, boys, mebbe we can get out there in time to stop 'em."

"They can't be far ahead o' us,"

Joe Scott growled. "If we make it plenty snappy, Billy, mebbe we can snag them skunks right in the act."

"Leave them rustlin' varmints ter me!" Buck Foster roared. "When I was ramroddin' a big spread down in the Panhandle——"

But neither Billy nor Joe were listening to Buck's yarn about that big spread he had rodded.

Billy had jammed the dulled rowels of his spurs against Danger's flanks, and was thundering down the trail, following directions given him by old Nelse Bailey.

The Circle J boss knew that he could not be mistaken in the trail he followed, and kept a sharp eye on the ridges ahead. But as he rode without catching sight of any one on the trail, he began to get uneasy.

Not until he passed a certain red butte and turned sharply into a wide, shallow valley did Billy rein in again and let his pards overtake him.

"Yonder"—he pointed to a clump of buildings that stood out dimly against a distant bend of the canyon —"is the Block B ranch house and buildin's. Accordin' to what Nelse Bailey says, his cattle are bunched in a wire trap back of the barns an' corrals."

"Come on!" Buck Foster yelled. "What in tarnation are we waitin' hyar fer?"

"We'll circle off yonder to them trees, then swing back left an' come in behind the ranch," Billy West went on grimly. "An' if we work it right, we'll be on high ground, where—— Look yonder!"

Billy's pointing arm veered sharply. Buck and Joe followed his pointing arm with keen eyes, and the pair of them were suddenly standing up in stirrups, yelling in excitement. For up a gentle slope that lifted from the valley to the crest of a crooked ridge filed a long line of cattle, with riders crowding them into the fastest possible pace.

"Rustlers at work, shore as shootin'!" Billy West growled. "Look to yore guns, boys, an' come on! I reckon we didn't start any too soon at that."

Even as he spoke, Billy was sending his powerful mount forward, and dropped his right hand to loosen the Colt in the holster that bounced against his right thigh.

Billy saw that the herd of cattle would reach the crest of that ridge long before he and his pards could get close enough to see for sure whether or not the critters wore the Block B iron. But he knew that a herd of cattle could not be whisked away with any great amount of speed and realized that he and his pards would come upon the cattle somewhere out on top of that ridge. Billy slowed down a little as he came to the base of the slope, which gave Buck and Joe a chance to overtake him.

"Take it easy, now!" he warned sharply. "We don't know for sure whether these jaspers are rustlers or not. They're on Block B range, but they——"

"They're gettin' away!" Buck Foster cut in. "Blast it, I ain't settin' hyar wastin' no time talkin'! I know danged well them jaspers is rustlers, an' hyar's where I settle their hash!"

Buck spurred his black mount sharply, and went hammering up the long slope, quartering toward the spot where the cattle and riders had disappeared over the ridge.

Billy and Joe rammed the hooks to their own broncs, and a few minutes later the three Circle J pards swarmed out on top of the ridge. They saw the herd of cattle, milling and bawling about as if undecided which way to go.

"Block B stuff, all right!" Billy called. "But where'd the wallopers go that was drivin' 'em?"

"Them snakes spotted us, that's a cinch," Joe Scott answered grimly. "They likely ducked into that canyon yonder an'—— Look out!"

Joe's warning came in a shrill voice that caused his pards to duck instinctively. And as the three cowboys ducked, the air seemed suddenly alive with snarling, whistling bullets.

From all quarters came the crash and boom of guns, punctuated by savage, exultant yells.

"Quit yore broncs an' take to cover!" Billy West yelled loudly. "We're trapped, boys, an' outnumbered plenty. Take whatever cover yuh—— Oweee!"

Billy swayed, lost his balance, and fell sidewise from his saddle, one hand clutching feebly at his side.

CHAPTER VI.

ALARMING NEWS.

BUCK FOSTER and Joe Scott were off their horses and scrambling toward their boss. But they halted now, for Billy had rolled to a sitting position. His left hand was still clamped to his side, and his face looked white and pinched. But Billy's right hand dropped swiftly to his thigh, came up with a Colt that roared flame-split thunder.

Buck and Joe whirled in time to see a pot-bellied hombre come thrashing from behind a clump of brush, clawing frantically at his chest.

"Yuh got that bushwhackin' snake, Billy!" Joe Scott whooped.

Then Buck and Joe were crouching, each gripping a gun that flamed and bounced. The bushwhackers had taken refuge in a nest of brush and rock, and were well hidden. But that brush began to shake now, and the hoarse voices of frightened men lifted shrilly as Circle J lead hammered through stiff twigs and screamed from half-hidden boulders.

"They're runnin', boys," Billy West called above the crash of guns. "They're duckin' over the crest o' the ridge. If we can overtake the skunks, mebbe we'll be able to stop 'em from gettin' to wherever they left their broncs."

Billy was on his feet now, his left hand still clutching his side. And he was able to keep abreast of Buck and Joe as the three of them charged up the ridge.

They were nearing the farther rim of the ridge when they heard the muffled pound of hoofs and the snorting of hard-spurred broncs.

The Circle J pards reached the slope of the ridge just in time to see a half dozen riders fog into a deep gully several hundred yards below them.

Buck and Joe fired the last few shells in their guns, then turned to face Billy West, who had opened his shirt and was staring at a shallow gash across his side.

"Nothin' more than a cut, but it shore burned like sixty for a while," he chuckled. "Did yuh boys recognize any o' the jaspers we glimpsed down yonder?"

"I shore did!" Joe Scott snapped. "Blaze Heath, Tom Garland, an' that ornery Pete Serber was three of 'em."

"Quit gassin' an' come on!" Buck Foster yowled, thumbing fresh shells into his hot gun. "We kin ketch them varmints if we hurry."

"Let 'em go!" Billy West snapped. "They know this country like a book, an' chasin' 'em now would be a waste o' time. The thing to do is get Nelse

Bailey's dogies back to his home corral."

Buck and Joe looked their disappointment, for the rannicky pair wanted to fog after those Bar H rustlers and try cornering them in the hills. But both of them had to admit that Billy's plan was the better, for the sun was swinging low, and those Block B dogies should be driven back to the ranch before dark.

Grumbling and muttering, the two punchers followed their boss back along the ridge to where the Bar H killers had started the fight.

When Buck and Joe overtook Billy he was kneeling beside a short, round-bodied hombre, who lay sprawled beside a clump of brush.

The hombre was still alive, and Sing Lo, who had taken to cover while the fight was on, was bending over him.

"Lis homblay no die," Sing Lo said bluntly, as he finished examining an ugly gash across the rustler's chest.

Billy West bent swiftly, staring at the wound. The bullet had torn slantwise across the rustler's chest, passing through the flesh just above his heart. But Billy saw quickly enough that the rustler was far from fatally wounded.

The man was still unconscious, however, from the shock of the bullet so close to his heart, and Billy began talking rapidly to his pards.

Sing Lo made a bandage and placed it about the rustler's chest, then produced a small bundle from an inside pocket of his loose-fitting black coat. He unwrapped the package very carefully, to reveal a squat little bottle.

The Chinaman turned his head well to one side, uncorked the bottle, and passed the mouth of it quickly back and forth beneath the nose of the rustler.

The wounded killer choked, made a strangling sound in his corded throat, then opened a pair of evil green eyes that looked blank and dazed. But the dazed look soon left those ugly eyes, and the squat jasper lay staring at his captors with a look of mingled fear and surprise.

"Hyar, yuh yaller heathen, give me thet bottle!" Buck Foster growled, snatching the bottle from Sing Lo's hand before the little Chinaman could replace the cork.

Sing Lo was not above sneaking a bottle of booze, or "tanglefoot," as he called it, along with him, and Buck Foster was suspicious of even that small vial.

"If this hyar stuff is hooch, chink, I'm tannin' yore hide!" Buck said darkly. "I've warned yuh afore about gittin' pickled every chanct yuh git. If this stuff is—— Ag-h-h-h!"

Buck had brought the neck of the bottle up close to the tip of his bent nose as he talked. He sniffed deeply —and reeled back as if struck in the face by a bronc's hoof. Then he dropped the little bottle, which Sing Lo quickly grabbed up and corked.

Buck did not notice what became of the bottle, however. The old ranny's breath came in whistling gasps, tears streamed down his leathery cheeks, and he finally lost his balance and sat down hard.

"Pizened!" he wheezed. "Billy, thet blasted chink pizened me a-purpose. I'll——"

"Haw-haw-haw!" Joe Scott roared. "Now, yuh snoopy ol' nitwit, mebbe yuh've finally learned a lesson. Why don't yuh say somethin', Buck?"

"I'm—dyin'!" Buck choked. "Blast thet chink! He——"

"Shut up, yuh two wallopers!" Billy West snapped peevishly. "Buck, that was a bottle of ammonia

yuh sniffed. The stuff's mighty good for bringin' a person that has fainted or been knocked cold back to life. But any time some goof takes a snort of ammonia like yuh did, he's shore in a peck o' trouble."

Joe Scott snickered and started to razz Buck further. But one look at Billy West's face caused Joe to button his lip and to sober quickly.

Buck dragged a bandanna from his hip pocket and began wiping his streaming eyes. The effects of the ammonia were already wearing off, and Buck bent a look on Sing Lo that was little short of murderous.

"Jist wait, chink!" the veteran promised. "I'll shore settle with yuh fer this trick, yuh sneak. I'll make yuh guzzle a hull quart o' that ammony. I'll——"

"I wish to gosh yuh'd button yore lip!" Billy West cut the veteran short.

Buck stiffened, but decided not to argue matters further. The veteran crawled to his feet and stamped forward, still mopping at his red and smarting eyes.

But Buck forgot his own troubles now for Billy West was talking to the sullen-faced, mean-eyed rustler.

"The rest o' yore Bar H pards got away, hombre," Billy was saying to the glowering rustler. "A slug passed mighty close to yore heart, an' I reckon yore rustlin' days are plumb over."

The rustler's evil face went white, and a groan of fear gurgled in his throat.

"Yuh—yuh mean I—I ain't got a chance o' gettin' well?" he gasped.

"It's a long ways to a doctor." Billy shrugged. "I won't say whether yuh'll die or not, hombre. But if yore pards had stayed an' helped yuh instead o' runnin' away like they done——"

Billy left the sentence unfinished, wanting the wounded cow thief to draw his own conclusions.

The rustler swore a gasping oath, evil eyes glinting and wild.

"The dirty snakes run out an' left me ter die, huh?" he gasped. "Waal, nobody kin treat Lafe McCray like that an'—— Say, West, have—have I got a chance if I got ter a doctor in time?"

"I'd say yuh'd shore have a good chance if a doctor had hold of yuh." Billy nodded. "But it's a long ways—— What's the matter?"

Lafe McCray had begun shaking violently, and for a moment Billy West felt sorry, thinking that perhaps the man was seriously hurt after all.

Then Billy saw that McCray's eyes were bulging in real terror, and was trying to understand why the hombre was so scared when Lafe McCray began talking almost wildly.

"Quick, West!" the rustler panted. "My hoss is jist over the ridge yonder, hid in some bresh. Git my hoss, feller, an' git me to town."

"Why should I bother with yuh?" Billy snapped, making his voice utterly cold. "Yuh an' the others tried to kill me, so——"

"Hurry!" McCray screamed the words out. "West, my only chance is ter have Doc Saunders fix me up. An' Blaze Heath an' the rest are headin' fer town right now ter drill ol' Nelse Bailey, who is at the doc's house. If Blaze an' the boys drill the doctor, which they may do, I'd die, shore."

Billy West's face was pinched and strained as he leaped to his feet to stare at his pards.

"Hear that?" he gasped. "Boys, we've got to ride like we never rode before if we want to save ol' Nelse Bailey. Fact is, I doubt if we ever make it in time."

CHAPTER VII.

SIX-GUN SHOW-DOWN.

BLAZE HEATH was like a madman as he charged down through the scarred hills and struck the trail that led to town. There was a bullet hole in the crown of the big hombre's hat, and another slug had torn a strip of skin from the side of his thick neck.

"Them Bitterroot gun hawks danged nigh got me!" he panted hoarsely. "But I'll fix ol' Nelse Bailey fer this. Send them gun-slingers out ter buck me, will he? Rattle yore hocks, hoss. I'll not jist cripple ol' Nelse Bailey like that fool Serber done this mornin'."

The Bar H boss struck the broad trail, his five companions galloping hard behind him. Nor did those six desperadoes so much as slow the gait of their laboring mounts on the long ride to Red Fork.

The sun sank behind a bold peak in the west and darkness had settled when Blaze Heath and his companions reined their spent and lathered horses to a halt at the edge of the little cow town.

"We'll leave our broncs hyar, instead o' goin' on to the livery barn," Heath snarled. "Yuh jaspers make shore yore guns is all ready fer action. That blasted sawbones will have ter be took care of along with Bailey."

"What's yore plan, Blaze?" Garland grunted. "Do we jist waltz over yonder to the doctor's shack an' git the job over with?"

"I ain't that big a fool!" Heath rasped. "Tom, yuh take Ben Dort an' Lew Payne an' saunter down ter the sheriff's office. We want ter git that ol' cuss located, afore we make a play."

"Want us ter plug that blasted star-toter, boss?" Bent Dort asked. He was a scrawny, rat-faced little killer who looked ornery enough to slit a man's throat for a plugged peso.

Lew Payne was a lanky, lantern-jawed hombre, and looked fully as evil as Ben Dort. The pair sidled over to Tom Garland, who stood fidgeting uneasily.

"No, blast it, don't try pluggin' that sheriff," Blaze Heath growled. "That is, onless yuh git a mighty good break, an' kin do it from cover."

"But that sheriff has got ter go, Blaze," Tom Garland growled. "Me, I think he's gittin' wise ter our rustlin' an' hoss stealin'."

"Shet up an' do what yo're told!" Blaze Heath growled. "Go locate that tin-star, like I said. Then come ter the private cardroom in the back o' the Mecca Saloon. Me an' Pete an' Lash Neal will be thar, with Alf Hawley."

Garland and the two men who had been detailed to go with him moved away, swallowed instantly by the dark shadows.

"It's them Bitterroot gun hawks I want ter tangle with!" Lash Neal rasped thinly. "They kilt pore Lafe McCray, fer I seen Lafe go down. An' Lafe was my pard."

"We'll git them skunks, yuh kin bet!" Blaze Heath growled angrily. "But we'll go keerful an' drill 'em from ambush. They're pizen with guns, if yuh ask me."

But that did not seem to reassure the stringy, long-faced Lash Neal in the least.

The skinny killer was still growling and muttering when Blaze led the way into the back room of the Mecca Saloon, a few minutes later.

But when big, red-nosed Alf Hawley came lumbering into the back room bearing bottles and glasses, the Bar H killers forgot their grievances

as they began to punish the fiery liquor.

"Alf, send one o' yore men over ter take a squint at Doc Saunders's place," Blaze Heath ordered. "Send a man yuh kin trust an' have him snoop around ontil he finds out fer shore who's at the doc's house."

Hawley nodded his big head and waddled from the room. He returned presently with a frowzy-looking bum, who had shifty, bloodshot eyes and acted unusually nervous.

"Perrin, yuh've been wantin' money enough ter git on a good drunk," Alf Hawley rumbled at the shifty-eyed little jasper. "Go over ter Doc Saunders's place an' do what I want done thar, an' I'll give yuh all the booze yuh kin guzzle fer a full week."

"I—I ain't up ter no rough stuff, Hawley," the little hombre squeaked.

Blaze Heath and the others laughed. Then Heath explained the errand, and the shifty-eyed little Perrin grinned a flabby grin.

"Easy, that is!" he cackled. "Shore, I'll find out what yuh want ter know, fellers. An' will I fill up on booze fer the next week!"

The little jasper was gone instantly, and the Bar H cutthroats settled down to steady drinking. They were feeling pretty gay by the time Tom Garland and the other two of the gang returned.

"We jist about got that blasted sheriff," Tom Garland snarled. "I was drawin' a bead on him while he set in his office an' was about ter pull the trigger when a bunch o' riders come foggin' up an' stopped. Me an' the boys ducked an' come right here."

"Danged good thing yuh didn't try shootin' that sheriff!" Alf Hawley growled. "Hyar, Tom, yuh an' Ben an' Lew drink up. Blaze tells me yuh boys is doin' a job to-night that should 'a' been did months ago. Told yuh all along, Blaze, that the only way ter git that Block B water was drill ol' Bailey."

Bottles and glasses were rattling noisily now, and the Bar H killers were beginning to feel the fiery stuff they drank.

Perrin came slinking back within a half hour, to report: "Ol' Nelse Bailey is all covered up in bed, asleep, I reckon. I couldn't ketch sight o' the sawbones, so I reckon he's out on a call some place."

"Hyar's a starter fer that drunk yo're goin' on, Perrin." Blaze Heath grinned, passing the runty little soak a full quart.

Then Blaze Heath turned to face his pack, his tawny eyes glinting murderously.

"Now's the time, men!" he rasped. "With the sawbones out o' the way, our job will be easy. Come on, Alf. Yuh want ter see the fun?"

"Don't think I'd miss it!" the big saloon owner chuckled evilly, and laid a fat hand against the butt of a gun that was holstered on his thick thigh.

Blaze Heath blew out the lamp, opened the back door, and stepped out into the night.

"The moon is up!" he growled, for the night was now pale with the glow of a full moon.

But nothing could stop those killers now. Grinning and nudging each other, they headed straight for the doctor's cottage. Nor did they halt until they were before the little house.

"We'll go right in," Blaze Heath growled. "I want that ol' buzzard of a Nelse Bailey ter know who's drillin' him."

Boots thumped the porch, and seven evil-eyed men swarmed into the doctor's neat little cottage—

seven cold-hearted gunmen who meant to murder a helpless old man. But those seven killers got a jolt when they swarmed into the bedroom.

There was a roll of quilts on the bed, made to look like a sleeping man covered with a sheet.

"Look out, men!" Heath choked. "Somebody has—has played a trick on us. Git out o' hyar fast as yuh can!"

The seven evil hombres charged back through the house, guns out, eyes darting glances right and left. But nothing happened, and the seven killers grinned a little sheepishly at each other as they stepped down into the moonlit yard, holstering their guns.

"They moved Nelse Bailey some place, that's all," Blaze Heath croaked. "But we'll find the ol' buzzard an' drill him yet, boys. Gosh, but——"

"I wouldn't go any further toward that gate, if I was yuh snakes!" came a harsh voice from the west corner of the house. "Heath, this is Sheriff Eli Walton talkin'. Billy West an' his Circle J pards fetched Lafe McCray, one o' yore gang, in a while ago."

"That blasted tin-star!" Alf Hawley croaked. "Blaze, if he savvies why we come hyar, we're sunk."

"Lafe McCray was wounded an' figgered he was dyin', which wasn't the case," the sheriff's grim voice droned on. "But Lafe was shore scairt, an' talked plenty. The game's up, Blaze Heath. I arrest yuh an' the men with yuh fer robbery, murder, rustlin', an' a few other sich deeds. Lift yore hands in the name o' the law!"

A stunned silence followed. Then boots rattled, and from the east corner of the house stepped Billy West, Buck Foster, and Joe Scott, guns leveled at the staring, dumfounded killers.

"Them Bitterroot gun hawks!" Blaze Heath roared. "They brung this trouble down on us, men!"

Those seven men there in the yard knew well enough what to expect if they ever came to trial. And as Blaze Heath's voice roared out, the seven of them were shifting, digging hard for holstered guns.

A shot rang out. Then the world seemed to explode in a roaring blast of shots, oaths, and the shrill yells of men whose nerves were cracking.

The hard-eyed old sheriff leaped clear of the house, a spitting Colt in each bony hand. Billy West saw that much, then centered his attention on the men before him.

Billy's Colt roared, and Tom Garland twisted, fell heavily. Then Billy was stumbling sidewise, a numb feeling along his left shoulder and arm. Billy realized that he had been hit, but kept his eyes on those shifting men ahead.

Beside him Joe Scott grunted loudly, but spread his booted feet wide and stayed upright.

Buck Foster dropped flat, but lifted his shaggy gray head and gun hand to keep pouring lead at those killers who were milling and darting about the yard.

Big, beefy Alf Hawley folded up, and Billy West heard Sheriff Walton's exultant whoop.

Then another slug found Billy, burning a blister along his cheek this time. Billy's Colt flamed in answer, and a smoking slug slapped scrawny Ben Dort fairly between the eyes.

Buck and Joe were both whooping, for their guns had knocked Pete Serber and Lash Neal kicking.

Billy saw that, and saw Lew Payne sprawl under a double roar from the sheriff's guns.

Then Billy saw Blaze Heath rac-

ing toward him, his twin guns running red streamers of fire that looked pale in the moonlight. Billy flinched, for a slug tore skin from his forearm. But the wound was not serious enough to cause the Circle J boss's gun to waver.

Billy fired, saw Blaze Heath shudder. But the Bar H owner kept coming, screaming oaths through lips that were twisted and red-flecked.

"Hold it, fool!" Billy yelled. "Heath, I don't want to drill yuh again. Steady, man, or——"

Billy's voice broke off, for a pair of slugs screamed dangerously close to his head. But Blaze Heath had fired his last shot.

The big jasper bent slowly forward, smoking guns sliding from lax fingers. There was a grin on his white, stricken face, and his lips moved slowly as he sank to the earth.

"I—got one—o' them—gun hawks!" he croaked loudly into the sudden hush. "I got—that West snake—afore I cashed in!"

"Waal, I'll be a horned toad!" Buck Foster roared, a moment later. "Billy, thet big galoot thought he drilled yuh. He—— Hey, me fine vest am tore nigh in two!"

Buck was staring goggle-eyed at a long bullet rent in one side of his pet bearskin vest. Buck had a slug through the flesh of his right thigh, but the tear in that vest hurt a lot worse.

"Aw, thet hunk o' mangy skunk fur yuh call a bearskin vest got chawed in two by the fleas on it," Joe Scott called snappily. "Buck, next time yuh see a sheep camp, why not have that vest dipped? It'd smell a heap better, I'm thinkin'."

"So be!" came Sing Lo's timid voice from a safe spot at the corner of the house.

"Am thet so?" Buck howled. "Joe Scott, yuh an' thet yaller heathen will git yore blocks knocked off. I'll learn yuh ter make remarks about me vest. I'll——"

And the battle was on while Sheriff Eli Walton and Billy West checked up to learn that the Bar H gang would bother no one else.

"Three o' these wallopers kin be patched up an' sent to the pen," the sheriff said, after he and Billy were through making the grim tally. "But what counts is thet Blaze Heath an' Alf Hawley, ringleaders, are shore ready to be put away with a Boot Hill address. I'm shore glad we moved Doc Saunders, Mrs. Bailey, an' ol' Nelse over to my house afore this started, West. Bullets was awful thick here fer a spell!"

An' the thicker the bullets is flyin', the better the Circle J pards like it. Watch fer the next story about 'em in an early issue o' Street & Smith's Wild West Weekly.

Cougar Hombre

By Philip F. Deere

Author of "The Depity's First Job," etc.

FLICKERING and hissing under the lash of a rain-laden wind, the fire threw a feeble yellow glow upon a scene that was eerie and sinister. The fire's pale light touched the great, thick boles of many big pine trees, painting them a ghastly color. The tops of those massive pines roared and hummed in the brewing storm, a black, seething mass showing faintly when lightning ripped down through the low-flung clouds.

Under the swaying, rain-dripping canopy of those lashing pines stood five men, their long, dark silhouettes grimly still in the flickering firelight. One of the five stood a little apart, his hands bound behind his back, white-haired head held proudly erect.

From the latter hombre's leathery throat a rope ran up in a dim line, to vanish above a great, thick pine bough that creaked and swayed slightly under the storm's furious onslaught. The rope showed again, coming down as if from a black void, to coil about the thick hand of a man who stood facing the white-haired captive.

Upon the rain-wet shirt of the gray-haired hombre winked a big, five-pointed star, with "Sheriff" lettered across the face of it. That tight-lipped, white-haired old lawman was Sheriff Lew Anderson, from Elk Butte.

Anger instead of fear shone in the straight-gazing gray eyes of the old officer, yet he was wishing mightily that he had taken time, that morning, to gather a posse before leaving Elk Butte on the trail of the four killers who now faced him. By the flickering red firelight, the sheriff studied each cruel face, trying des-

perately to think of some way by which he might outwit them and escape.

The sheriff's gaze lingered longest on the face of "Tab" Warner, leader of the four killers. He was a thin, wiry fellow, with a dark, savagely lined face from which shone two of the coldest, most murderous-looking blue eyes the sheriff had ever seen. Tab had a record that was as black as the storm-swept night, and it was said that he had killed almost twenty men.

The jasper who stood holding the free end of the hang rope was Gill Reed, a husky, powerfully muscled hombre with a flat, crime-stamped face and a pair of eyes that were as black and deadly as the eyes of a coiled snake. His flat lips twisted into a sneering grin, and he spat deliberately toward the sheriff's booted feet.

"Gittin' scairt, lawman?" he asked in a thick, gritty tone.

"Not so's yuh could notice it, Reed," the sheriff grunted, and swung his eyes to Nelse Payne, a tall, slab-sided, horse-faced jasper who had squinty brown eyes that were always darting uneasily about.

Payne bragged that he had escaped from three State prisons, and that he could outwit any lawman who ever wore a badge. And right now Lew Anderson was wondering if there wasn't something to the slab-sided, crooked-jawed killer's bragging, for it had been Nelse who had waylaid him far down these mountains and roped him from his horse as he rode up a twisting trail.

"Aw, this ol' goat ain't gonna tell us nothin', chief," the fourth member of the murderous crew snarled suddenly. "Let's bust his neck an' git on up ter the cave country above hyar. This storm is gittin' wuss right along."

The speaker was Gabe Snyder, a short, thick-bodied man, who moved with a swinging, surprisingly swift stride for one of his build. His face was eternally clouded by a dark scowl, and his small, green eyes were the eyes of a man who would kill for the sheer fun of it.

"A nice lot, ain't yuh?" the sheriff grated, his inspection of the four finished. "A fine, upstandin' bunch o' two-legged skunks, if ever I seen such in my life."

"Never mind the compliments, Anderson," said Tab Warner in a flat, chill tone. "What I want to know is how yuh smelled out our trail and managed to follow us here to Mystery Mountain."

"Skunk tracks never was hard to foller," the sheriff bit out. "I cut yore sign there at the express office, where yuh murdered pore ol' Joe Deems, the agent, an' robbed the office o' twenty thousand dollars gold about midnight last night."

"Quit lyin'!" snarled Gill Reed, and gave the hang rope a stiff jerk.

"Yeah, that sort o' stuff don't fool us, Anderson," Warner snapped. "Us four know how to fog our sign. Besides, yuh couldn't 'a' trailed us until daylight, which means yuh wouldn't 'a' reached these mountains until to-night some time."

"Instead, yuh got into the foothills down yonder by noon, which means yuh rode out o' town right after we did," Payne sneered. "Yuh ain't foolin' with no greenhorns, sheriff. So quit tryin' ter lie ter us."

"By lantern light I could see that four hoss-backers had stopped at the express office." The old sheriff shrugged. "That told me, naturally, that four hombres had kilt Deems an' robbed the safe."

"So yuh jist naturally went inter a trance an' figgered out that we'd

head fer Mystery Mountain," sneered Gabe Snyder.

"I knowed," Anderson said slowly, "that the high passes south of Elk Butte was all clogged from last week's blizzard. The bridge acrost Thunder Crick, to the west, has been closed two months, because floods weakened it. East, there's nothin' but low hills, that taper off into the plains."

"Well, I'll be danged!" Tab Warner gasped angrily.

"So," the sheriff growled, "there was only one way that *I* would 'a' headed, if I had pulled a robbery an' murder. That way was north. Besides that, I've been hearin' strange tales about a wild man who lives up hyar on Mystery Mountain. I played a hunch an'——"

"Poked yore fool neck into a noose!" Warner finished angrily. "But what's that yuh say about a wild man livin' up here?"

"I think I savvy it now," the sheriff rasped. "Yuh an' these snakes who take yore orders have been holed up hyar on Mystery, fixin' up a hide-out. Trappers that come up hyar have been run out, by yuh jaspers sneakin' around their camps an' squallin' like cougars."

The four outlaws exchanged puzzled glances, but said nothing.

"It was slick work, all right," the sheriff went on. "Them fool trappers come tearin' back to Elk Butte, tellin' how some feller that was dressed in cougar skins an' rode a big black hoss follered 'em wherever they went. They called this feller the 'Cougar Man' an' was scared half to death of him."

"Are yuh loco or what?" snorted Tab. "We ain't never set foot on this mountain ontil to-day. An' we wouldn't go 'round wrapped up in cat hides, neither. If some jigger got in our way, we'd put a slug in him."

"Which we'll do ter any fool that comes in hyar from now on," Gabe Snyder snarled. "This is perfect hide-out country, an' we've been told there's a lot o' big caves up on the main mountain."

"Speakin' o' them caves reminds me how nice it'd be ter have a hot meal an' git inter a dry bed," grunted Gill Reed. "Yuh fellers come on, an' help me hoist this nosey ol' cuss up. We'll wrap the rope around a tree, then—— Ahhhh!"

Gill Reed's voice died in a gasping sigh. The big, burly outlaw spun slowly around, nerveless hands slipping from the hang rope. His knees bent then, and he pitched forward, to lie limp and still. And from out of the black, wind-swept night beyond the circle of firelight came the shrill, ear-jolting cry of a mountain lion!

II.

Tab Warner, Nelse Payne, and Gabe Snyder almost ran over each other getting beyond the circle of firelight and into the shadows.

"Stand where yuh are, badge-toter!" Tab snarled from the darkness. "Yuh make a break, an' I'll cut yuh down shore as powder will burn."

Sheriff Lew Anderson had not thought of making a break. He was so dumfounded that he simply stood there, staring down in blank amazement at the slumped and silent outlaw who lay at his feet.

Gill Reed's Stetson had fallen off, and he lay on his back, white face upturned. But there was no mark on the man's face, nor could the sheriff see any trickle of crimson through clothing that would mark a wound.

"Wh-what happened ter Gill, chief?" Nelse Payne croaked from somewhere beyond the fire. "He wasn't shot, or we'd 'a' heard the gun."

"I wish I *knowed* what happened to Gill!" Warner's voice came in a panting hiss.

"Here, too," Gabe Snyder began. "I can't figger out—— Ugh!"

The squatty killer's voice ended in a grunting sigh.

"Gabe!" Tab Warner and Nelse Payne both called in the same breath.

The answer which came was the shrill scream of a mountain lion!

The staring sheriff saw the pair rear up and saw their guns begin ripping red banners out into the blackness beyond them. The sheriff knew that now was his chance to make a run for it. He half turned —and tried to yell in dismay as he saw a great, tawny figure leaping toward him from the trees.

He had a fleeting glimpse of long yellow hair whipping out behind a well-molded head. He saw, too, a lean, healthy young brown face, from which two tawny eyes gazed intently. Then the most powerful arms the sheriff had ever felt were whirling him up, and a hand was cupped over his mouth.

The sheriff felt himself whisked out into the blackness beyond the fire as if he were being hurled through space. And the thing had happened so swiftly that the guns of Tab Warner and Nelse Payne were still banging their hoarse music.

The sheriff squirmed, trying to remove that hand from over his lips so that he could speak. But he felt those powerful arms tighten warningly, and decided swiftly to let well enough alone. Then the sheriff felt the speed of that strange young hombre slacken, and he was standing on his own feet before he fully realized it.

"Stay here!" a cool, level voice ordered sharply, and the sheriff stood gaping into the wind, knowing that the wild-looking youth had left him.

"Jupiter!" the officer croaked. "Am I loco, or is this fool thing really happenin'?"

Through the trees yonder he could see a tiny red eye winking. That was the fire where he had stood, waiting for a rope to choke the life from him. He was trying to figure out how that yellow-haired youth had downed two of Tab Warner's men when he heard the soft padding of a bronc's hoofs close by.

Then out of the black night those great arms reached, and the sheriff almost yelled as he felt himself yanked up. But before he could yell, he felt his legs fall astride a horse's bare back and felt those powerful arms steady him as the horse shot away faster than the sheriff ever remembered feeling a horse start with him.

In the next instant, cold dread clutched Sheriff Anderson's heart, for he found himself hurtling through the black night at a speed that was more than just alarming.

"Hold this nag down!" the sheriff yelled. "Blame it, young feller, yuh'll bust both our necks! This bronc will take a bad spill onless yuh—— Blazes!"

By a sudden flare of lightning the sheriff saw that the horse under him was thundering along the very lip of a canyon that yawned sickeningly close. He had also seen that the horse wore neither bridle nor hackamore!

Lew Anderson's brain whirled, his tongue felt like a piece of flannel in his mouth, and he knew that he was shaking from head to foot. "Stop

this critter!" he croaked. "This hoss will go into the canyon with us if yuh don't slow him down!"

"Yes, Black Eagle will go into the canyon," came that cool, level voice.

"Then, fer Heaven's sakes, do somethin'!" the sheriff croaked. "Turn me loose an' let me jump. Then yuh better jump too, afore he——"

The sheriff knew that the horse soared suddenly from the earth. He felt himself being hurled through space, and felt the drench of sweat that poured from his skin. Then the horse struck the earth again with jarring force, and the sheriff heard himself muttering weak phrases that were merely a jumble of meaningless words.

"Black Eagle has us safe now," the strange, even voice said. "That crevice he jumped is ten feet wide and a hundred feet deep. If any one follows us they will die in that crevice, Sheriff Anderson."

"Crevice! Ten feet wide! A hundred feet deep! I—— Say, who are yuh? Where——"

The sheriff caught himself, for he heard a low, not unpleasant chuckle. Then he was much too busy worrying again to ask any more questions, for Black Eagle had swerved sharply, and Sheriff Lew Anderson had ridden too much not to know that the horse was traveling at full speed down a slope that most riders would have taken at a cautious walk.

The officer heard a dull, booming roar, and reckoned that it was his shattered nerves hammering at his skull. But he discovered presently that the roar grew louder, took on a familiar sort of note. He had just recognized it as the booming of a waterfall when those lean arms that steadied his shuddering body tightened.

"Bend yore head low," the yellow-haired youth's voice ordered.

The sheriff felt the horse under them slow, advance at an easy trot. Then water struck the sheriff in a battering cascade, wrenching a gasp from him. But the next moment the smashing impact of the water was gone, and he heard that soft, pleasant laughter again.

The black horse stopped, and Sheriff Anderson smelled the faint odor of wood smoke, mingled with the smell of cooking meat. The sheriff felt himself lifted easily upward, and the next instant his booted feet were thudding loudly against solid stone.

But those powerful hands were still upon his arms, pushing him forward into a blackness no ordinary human's eye could have pierced. Then he felt himself halted, and knew that one of those mighty arms had slid over his shoulder, reaching forward.

Something creaked faintly, and the next instant Sheriff Lew Anderson stood gaping, eyes bulging. He was staring into a great, vaulted chamber, where a huge fireplace had been built into a natural crevice. Great logs burned there, and the chamber was pleasantly warm, lighted by the soft glow from the blazing logs.

Before the fireplace hung a brown and dripping haunch of venison, roasting by the heat from the big log fire.

The sheriff saw comfortable-looking homemade furniture about the cavern room, and saw that the floor was covered with animal pelts. Then he was pushed gently into the chamber, and heard the door close behind him.

He turned, eyes fairly popping out as he stared at his host. The yellow-haired youth was smiling

faintly and slapping water from his thick hair in swift, deft strokes. The sheriff saw great, spreading shoulders and a deep, curving chest that tapered down to hips and waist that were so lean as to look almost scrawny in comparison with the youth's upper body.

Sheriff Anderson knew that he was staring bug-eyed, but could not help it. The strange, tawny-eyed youth wore a buckskin shirt, and buckskin trousers, yet over these were drawn other garments that had been fashioned from mountain-lion pelts, hair side out.

The lion-skin jacket was close-fitting, and fastened by a single, handmade wooden button. The garment which incased the hombre's leanly powerful legs was on the order of regular cowboy chaps, only much closer fitting. And upon the youth's feet were tough moccasins, undoubtedly handmade.

"Here, turn around," the tawny-eyed young giant said quietly, and the sheriff felt himself spun sharply, but not before he had seen a huge, razor-keen knife whisked from beneath that cougar-skin coat.

The sheriff felt cold steel brush his wrists, then his limp arms fell to his sides. He turned quickly, his scattered wits beginning to assemble themselves once more.

"Who in tarnation are yuh?" he asked hoarsely.

He watched the lean brown face go sober and saw a strange, tense look creep into those piercing, tawny eyes.

"So yuh are Sheriff Lew Anderson," the stranger said quietly.

The sheriff gulped uneasily, strangely worried by the intensity of those unwinking, roundly watchful eyes.

"Yeah, I'm Lew Anderson," the officer gulped. "But who in blazes are yuh?"

"My name," the youth pronounced slowly, "is Tom Cougar."

The sheriff blinked, was keenly watchful for a sparkle of those eyes that would tell him that he was being joshed. But the eyes of Tom Cougar were still round and keen and watchful, and his straight, almost thin mouth had set into a grim line.

"I've often wondered"—Tom Cougar's words struck at the sheriff like a physical blow—"what the man who killed my father looked like. I know now, for you, Sheriff Lew Anderson, are that man."

III.

Sheriff Lew Anderson never remembered backing across the room. All he knew was that a stout chair struck the backs of his knees, and that he sat down in the chair with smashing force.

The sheriff was no coward by any stretch of the imagination, for he had brought law into this country and made it stick where other men had failed. Yet Lew Anderson was shaking now, and could not take his eyes from that bronzed, grim-lipped young face.

Tom Cougar had stepped forward, and stood now, sheathing his big knife. "Hungry?" he asked pleasantly enough.

The officer started, cursing inwardly because he was so jumpy. "Shore, son, I'm hungry," he nodded. "But first, let's git this straight about—about yore father."

"Let's forget that, sheriff," Tom Cougar said slowly. "For one thing, it happened many years ago. Then, too, my father was an outlaw—one of a band of men who caused a lot of trouble. He told me that,

when he died here in this cave. He admitted that he had thrown in with that wild bunch just for the fun of it."

"Outlaw?" the sheriff echoed. "What did yuh—er—say his name was?"

"I didn't say, sheriff." Tom Cougar shrugged his massive shoulders. "An' I never will say. I took the name of Tom Cougar because the Indians who used to hunt in here started calling me the cougar boy. My real name would only bring trouble, as my father explained before he died. So I am Tom Cougar, and who my father was does not matter."

The sheriff felt questions bubbling to his tongue, but bit them back. Tom Cougar's tone said definitely that the matter was closed once and for all.

Sheriff Anderson watched Tom unbutton the lion-skin jacket, start slipping out of it. Then the officer was rearing up out of his chair, a yelp of amazement passing his lips. Tom Cougar flung the jacket toward a bed, turned sharply to face Anderson.

"Is—is that *real?*" the sheriff gulped, pointing toward Tom's throat.

Tom understood and chuckled slightly as he lifted a powerful hand, clutched a long strand of glinting yellow objects that were about his neck. He lifted the strand over his head, tossed it wordlessly toward the sheriff.

"By thunderation, they are real!" the sheriff gasped, as he sank slowly back into his chair.

In his hands he held a long string of gold nuggets that had been pierced by a small drill, then strung in a thin but very stout strip of rawhide. The bottom nugget was almost round, and perhaps a third the size of an egg. Up from that big nugget on each side were strung smaller chunks of gold, some of them rounded, others oddly shaped.

"Boy, do yuh know the worth o' this trinket?" the sheriff cried.

"In dollars and cents, it would be worth quite a little." Tom Cougar smiled faintly.

"Where'd yuh git this?" The sheriff's voice was shaking with excitement.

"I made it," came the calm reply. "I know of a canyon here on Mystery Mountain, where there is more gold than any sensible man would know what to do with. I get gold there when I need money for guns or food or clothing. I picked those nuggets up in the canyon I mention and made them into the necklace yuh have."

"Yuh mean to say," the sheriff almost yelled, "that yuh know where there's gold enough to make yuh rich?"

"There's gold enough in that canyon to make a good many men rich," Tom Cougar said quietly. "But I do not want to be rich. If I felt that way, I'd be living outside somewhere, an' I'd have to mix and mingle with men. I tried that—once."

"Yuh—yuh've been outside?" the sheriff prompted.

"Once." Tom Cougar's voice was chill now. "For two years, I worked as a bronc rider and cowboy down along the Mexican border."

"But why'd yuh come back hyar?" the sheriff asked. "Didn't yuh like the people yuh worked with?"

"Sure, I liked the people," Tom Cougar said flatly. "But where there are many men, there are bound to be some bad-tempered ones, just as there are bad-tempered

horses in the wild bands that range these mountains."

"Yuh—yuh had trouble?" the sheriff guessed.

"I had to kill a man," Tom Cougar bit out. "Oh, no, I'm not on the dodge. This jasper forced the fight on me, and there were witnesses to swear I shot only in self-defense. But I was taken into a jail, locked in a cell that was unfit for a hog to be penned in, and treated like some dangerous animal. When the law finally had to turn me loose, I came back here where I have peace and happiness."

Tom Cougar reached down, lifted the valuable necklace from the sheriff's lap, and slipped it back over his tawny head. The youth turned then, and began laying out plates and other dishes. Within a very short time, he and the sheriff were seated at a stout table, and the sheriff felt sure he had never tasted better food in his life.

When the meal was over, and the sheriff leaned back smoking a cigarette, he tried again to bring up the subject of that canyon with its horde of free gold. But Tom Cougar merely smiled his faint smile, and the officer knew he would get no further information.

"Those men who had you prisoner," Tom Cougar said suddenly. "Who were they, and why did they want to hang yuh?"

The sheriff sat bolt upright, swearing in alarm. Being rescued by this strange youth, and the things which had followed, had caused the sheriff to completely forget Tab Warner and those other three cutthroats.

Speaking swiftly, the sheriff explained who the outlaws were, and why they had meant to hang him.

"But I've bungled things," he finished grimly. "I should 'a' stayed back there until I had them snakes in handcuffs. They'll high-tail it back into this mountain, an' it'd maybe take months to git the coyotes jumped out into the open."

"They won't go far," Tom Cougar chuckled. "Yuh see, sheriff, I found five saddled horses close to that fire an' stripped the broncs of their gear."

"Yuh did?" the sheriff whooped. "Well, son, that's somethin', anyhow. Them four won't git far on foot. Come daylight, we can—— Say, what did yuh do to Gill Reed an' Gabe Snyder?"

"Yuh mean the big fellow who held the rope, an' the chunky little one?" Tom Cougar asked, smiling.

"Shore, that's the two. Reed is the big un. The chunky skunk is Gabe Snyder. What happened to them two?"

Tom Cougar got up, crossed the room in a swift, silent stride. He flung open the heavy split-log door and vanished into the blackness beyond it for a moment. When he returned, he was carrying a thick coil of pliant leather which the sheriff recognized instantly as a handmade whip. Cougar let the whip uncoil, and gave it a flick. The lash end of the whip slithered across the sheriff's knees and into his lap like a live thing.

"Look at the lash," Tom Cougar called.

The sheriff lifted the lash, frowning as he noticed that instead of the usual keen popper, the whip had a round wad of buckskin tied to the end. A single lifting of that buckskin-covered ball brought a whistle of amazement from the sheriff.

"Chunk o' lead in there, huh?" he guessed.

"No," Tom Cougar smiled. "There is no lead in that buckskin bag. What yuh feel in there is a

nugget, almost as large as the biggest one on this necklace."

"Nugget?" the sheriff yelled.

"Yes, a gold nugget." Tom nodded. "I can reach out a good many feet and tap a man on the head with that nugget at the end of this whip. I could smash a man's skull with it. But I did not smash the skulls of Gill Reed an' Gabe Snyder. I only stunned that pair."

From outside came a shrill whinny. Tom Cougar stiffened, head canted to one side as he listened. The whinny came again, and Tom smiled grimly down upon the sheriff.

"We won't have to hunt yore outlaws, sheriff," Tom said slowly. "They're here, somewhere close. Black Eagle signals like that when he smells strangers."

IV.

The pale, chill dawn showed four bedraggled, haggard-looking men who sat hunched about a spluttering fire. Behind the men, a great waterfall boomed dull music, and the spray from the falls fanned out like steam along the roiling water of the swift mountain stream.

Across the smoky fire Tab Warner's thin face looked more evil than usual, and his eyes were the hot, red-flecked eyes of a killer. Gill Reed, Nelse Payne, and Gabe Snyder watched their vicious leader in an uneasy silence, for Warner sat with a cocked gun gripped in each hand.

"We've got to find that blasted sheriff, I tell yuh!" Tab's voice was a whining snarl. "An' we've also got to find out who done that squallin' an' knocked yuh two fools sprawlin'."

Warner's eyes were on Gill Reed and Gabe Snyder now.

"Why pick on us?" burly Gill Reed snarled. "Dang it, chief, Gabe an' me didn't have a show. We don't know yit what batted these knots on our heads."

"Neither does the chief or me," Nelse Payne croaked. "We never seen a thing, an' I'm still wonderin' what hit yuh fellers. I feel——"

"Look!" Gabe Snyder blatted, and flung a thick arm toward a distant rim.

The storm had blown itself out during the night, and now the first rays of a rising sun were touching the barren rim rocks far above the floor of the deep canyon. And there on one of those rim rocks, plainly visible in the red sunlight, was a lean, yellow-haired man, sitting motionless astride a big black horse that wore neither saddle, bridle or hackamore.

"What a hoss!" Gill Reed breathed. "Man, *what* a hoss!"

"Look at that long-haired jasper's clothes!" Payne gasped. "If he ain't dressed in cougar hides I'll eat my hat. Do yuh reckon he's the one that——"

Payne did not finish. Up there on the rim, that lean, powerfully built man on the black horse cupped hands to lips, and down into the canyon crashed the eerie, nerve-tightening scream of a cougar.

"Git him!" Warner howled. "There's the skunk that horned into our play."

Tab Warner was shooting by the time his voice pinched off. His three companions yanked guns, began shooting. But the black horse reared, and skimmed away from the rim as if actually flying.

"Out o' Colt range," Tab Warner panted. "Git rifles. He may show up again."

The four whirled to the wet saddles they had lugged most of the

night, stripping carbines from saddle scabbards. Suddenly from behind them came that nerve-shattering squall, and the outlaws whirled wildly, rifles whipping up. But there was only the rugged canyon, with the long banner of white water spilling grandly over a fifty-foot drop into a foaming pool.

"He must be up above them falls," Warner wheezed. "Come on, men! We better head back down this canyon afore that snake crosses the crick an' gits out above us."

The four whirled, and ran swiftly down along the stream. Not until they had turned the second bend did they halt, to stand blowing and gulping air into tortured lungs.

"Side canyon yonder!" Tab Warner panted. "We better take off into that, then get out on high ground. An' if yuh sight that cougar jasper, shoot to kill. Unless we git——"

"Unless yuh four drop them guns an' start clawin' the sky, the buzzards will git a feast!" a hard voice rapped down at the outlaws.

The four outlaws crouched, heads twisting as they glanced up. On a ledge a hundred feet above them crouched Sheriff Anderson, a long rifle pointing down from his shoulder.

With a vicious snarl Tab Warner triggered a shot at the sheriff, leaping toward the bluff at the same instant. Seeing the craftiness of their chief's move, the other three cutthroats leaped in close to the bluff just as a shot came smashing down at them. But the sheriff's slug missed, and the four outlaws were protected now by the bulge of the cliff's face.

"I seen a canyon back up yonder a piece," Warner snarled. "Come on, men! If we get into that side draw afore—— Look yonder!"

Tab pointed with his Winchester. His three companions looked, and were suddenly swearing in muffled whispers, their own rifles snapping up.

Down the center of the canyon came Tom Cougar, bounding along in great, swift strides, yet making no noise that the four cutthroats could hear.

Warner watching the racing youth over his rifle sights, and his face twisted swiftly into a murderous grin. "Here's somethin' to stop yore cougar squallin', yuh blasted hillbilly!" he snarled softly, and pressed the rifle's trigger.

Gill Reed, Nelse Payne and Gabe Snyder all fired, even though the racing youth out in the center of the the canyon had spun half around, then pitched face down into a clump of brush.

"Rake that brush with slugs!" Tab Warner howled.

Four rifles came up, belching flaming thunder. And from the brush patch came twin streamers of blazing powder.

Big Gill Reed yelled hoarsely, clutched at his chest, pitched slowly forward. Those two guns in the brush patch blared again, and Nelse Payne spun like a top, a gurgling scream dying on his pallid lips as he fell backward beside the bluff's base.

"Get that snake!" Tab Warner screeched, and fired at the brush clump as he darted toward a boulder.

Gabe Snyder swore as slugs singed the air beside his head, and leaped suddenly out into the open. From that ledge above, the sheriff's rifle spat once, and Gabe twisted queerly sidewise, shuddering in death as he rolled to the ground.

With a frenzied yell, Tab Warner leaped to his feet, darting back to the protection of the bluff. He re-

alized suddenly that had he and his men used six-guns instead of rifles, they could have rattled slugs through that brush patch yonder much more swiftly. Cursing, eyes wild with rage, he flung the rifle down and went for the twin guns which were belted to his waist.

"Hold it, hombre!" Tom Cougar called sharply from the brush clump.

Tab had his guns out, and his lean thumbs hit the hammers, flinging them back. But a split second before his thumbs could let those spiked hammers fall, a mighty hand seemed to smash him back against the cliff. Crimson oozed from a round black hole under his left eye, and he did not hear the blasting roar of his own guns as he let the hammers drop in pitching forward.

"Tom, are yuh all right?" the sheriff yelled frantically.

From the brush patch, Tom Cougar lifted himself, crimson streaking one side of his face.

"Sure, I'm all right," he called. "Come get yore outlaws, sheriff. I saw the five horses I freed last night out on the east rim yonder a while ago. I'll get the horses."

"Yuh mean them snakes are done fer?" the sheriff asked incredulously.

But Tom Cougar was already moving back up the valley in those long, silent strides. By the time the sweating sheriff worked his way to the bottom of the canyon Tom Cougar was coming down the steep slope on the opposite side, mounted on the Black Eagle, and driving five horses ahead of him.

Tom swung sharply upcanyon letting the gentle saddle horses drift on down of their own accord. He was soon back, four saddles roped together and slung over one shoulder. He dismounted and in silence rigged four of the saddle horses which had stopped beside the stream.

"Son, I don't know how to thank yuh fer helpin' me like yuh have," the sheriff said slowly. "Yuh saved my life, an' blasted these killers off the map to boot."

"The only thanks I want is for you to keep secret what yuh know about me and Mystery Mountain," Tom said sharply. "If yuh told the things yuh know, other men would come here. An' the comin' of other men always means trouble."

Before the amazed sheriff could reply, Tom turned, leaped aboard his great black horse, and went sweeping away along the canyon. The sound of Black Eagle's hoofs died away, and the sheriff was bending to his grisly task of loading the four dead outlaws across saddles when the shrill, wild cry of a cougar floated down from somewhere high among the craggy ridges. The sheriff shuddered, and finished his task with haste.

Behind one saddle he found a stout canvas sack, which held the express-office loot. And now the sheriff swung swiftly to the bare back of his own horse.

"Well, I ain't the rider that younker is," he chuckled slowly. "But maybe I can stick on this bronc's bare back ontil I git back up yonder to where Tom Cougar stripped the hosses last night. All I hope is that I can find another good excuse to come back hyar some day. I'd like to know Tom Cougar a lot better than I do. Git along, bronc."

Crazy Q's Rattlesnake Trail

By George C. Henderson

Author of "The Hoss Herd From Crazy Q," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BONANZA HUNTS GOLD.

DOWN in the rocky river bed scarcely two hundred feet away from him, "Buckaroo" Boone could see the outlaws setting their murder trap.

At a wide bend in the stream he saw the grizzled, silvery-haired prospector hunkered down beside a rivulet, sloshing water around and around in his iron gold pan. It was the famous "Bonanza" McIvor, known as the "El Dorado King."

Dirty, bristly-bearded bushwhackers bobbed and ducked behind boulders, sneaking closer and closer to Bonanza and the three Indians who were with him. Their approach was so silent and the roar of the near-by waterfall so loud that even the keen-eyed redskins did not suspect their presence.

Buckaroo wanted to yell a warning, but he could not. A cruel gag filled his mouth. A leather thong, drawn tightly about his mouth and behind his head held that cloth gag in place.

He was cinched up to a tree by a lasso wound around his legs, body, and arms so tightly that the pine bark bruised his flesh.

On a big fir log beside him sat a bean-pole gunman, whose sharp, skeleton face was twisted in a gloating sneer. "Stingaree" Karns was a deadly Diamondback desperado, a pard of "Diamond" Harg.

Stingaree flourished a cat-o'-nine-tails lash, the tips of which were armed with lead balls. Suddenly he slashed Buckaroo across the bare, bound arm, drawing red spurts from the flesh wherever the lead pellets struck.

"Do yuh want me to cut yore skin to ribbons?" snarled Stingaree. "Stop that tuggin' and squirmin', or I'll cut one of your eyes out with this whip."

Buckaroo's granite features turned a little pale at the thought of being blinded by the slashing of that leaded whip. The young Crazy Q boss kept his gray eyes level as he gazed fearlessly into Stingaree's bony distorted face, but inwardly he was filled with horror.

Stingaree was just vicious enough to cut and slash at Buckaroo's face until his eyes were torn and mangled.

Standing there bound to the tree, Buckaroo straightened his shoulders and stiffened his spine until he stretched to his full six feet three of height. Big, blond, and rather handsome, the Crazy Q ranny had muscles like steel wire and the strength of a Mexican mustang, but for once he was helpless.

Even his triggerless hide-out gun on which he so often depended lay on the pine needles with his other Colts, beside a big gray Stetson. That Stetson still bore a band of gold eagles and double eagles, which the Diamondback outlaws had not got around to dividing up.

In a grassy glade, Buckaroo's pony was tied, poking its muzzle into the green foliage overhead to browse. The cowboy's Winchester was still in its scabbard under the *rosadero*. But it might as well have been a thousand miles away, for all he could do to get it.

"Reckon my number's up at last," he reflected grimly. "I ain't got a friend within a hundred miles. Nobody knows I come up here. And there shore ain't no way I can get free of these ropes, with Stingaree watching me every minute."

Skulking, flitting figures moving among the rocks and brush drew his attention to Bonanza McIvor's danger again.

Riflemen crouched down, levered shells into Winchester chambers and drew careful beads on Bonanza and the three Indians with him.

Buckaroo held his breath, expecting to hear the crack of the guns and to see the helpless victims fall. But the desperadoes did not shoot. They seemed to be waiting for something.

The bound cowboy shifted his attention to Bonanza McIvor. Never had he expected to see the famous prospector on a gold hunt. For a quarter of a century, Bonanza had maintained his reputation as the most mysterious gold hunter by pulling off a series of wild and woolly stunts, such as hiring special trains, using zebras for pack animals, marching through towns with bands playing, and building a huge castle in the wilderness.

Looking at the long-haired old man in his coonskin cap and buckskin clothes, Buckaroo Boone could hardly believe that Bonanza was rated a millionaire; that the aged hombre had put thousands upon thousands of dollars into a castle, which was so far away in the Shoshone wilderness that no one could live in it, and which was still unfinished after twenty-five years.

Bonanza was working the sand and black dirt in the wide bend of the shallow fork. He took samples, washed them around in his gold pan until only a spoonful of silt remained, then he put in a little quicksilver to absorb the gold flakes.

Finally the old fellow tossed his long, silvery hair out of his eyes, stabbed a crick out of his back with his fist and straightened up.

"Piker diggin's, boys," he growled. "There ain't nothin' here worth settin' up sluice boxes for. Pack the burros, and we'll move on."

Bonanza had all the money he could ever use. But the gold fever was in his blood and he couldn't stop hunting the yellow metal.

Buckaroo saw the skulkers snap rifles to their shoulders and a strangled cry died in his throat behind that gag.

Like an executioner's firing squad, the bandits deliberately shot the three Indians down.

Crack! Bang! Crack! To the bandits it was like shooting ducks on the water with a shotgun.

Two of the Indians dropped dead at the first volley. The third fell wounded, rolled over once and whipped out a gun. But he could see no target. All the skulkers kept down out of sight while they poured in a deadly hail of lead that literally chopped the redskin to pieces.

Out of horrified eyes, Buckaroo helplessly watched the massacre. For a long time, those Indians and others had been the faithful workers and guards of Bonanza McIvor. They alone knew the location of his hidden mines. But to-day they'd been careless. The roar of Rainbow Falls had drowned out the sound of the outlaws' approach.

Bonanza, his coonskin cap gone, silvery hair flying like a banner in the breeze, had his gun out and was streaking for cover.

As the old man passed a clump of willows, a lasso caught him around one booted leg and hurled him face down in the soft sand. Instantly two men pounced on him, held his nose in the dirt, and tied his arms behind him.

Old Bonanza fought and struggled like a bobcat in a trap, but he was helpless. A blindfold was tied around his eyes, and he was jerked to his feet.

Not until Bonanza was blindfolded, did the leader of the Diamondback raiders step out from cover and stop to look around him, grinning triumphantly. It was black-clad, burly Diamond Harg.

It was Diaomnd Harg's turn to crow. His victory was perfect. There before him, blindfolded and bound, was the richest prospector in the West. A little torture would soon make Bonanza McIvor tell where his secret mines were hidden.

Up on a high ledge above the deeper part of the river was Diamond's bitterest enemy, Buckaroo Boone, also helpless and bound. The Indian guards all were dead.

"What do yuh want of me?" yelped old Bonanza. "I got no gold with me. Turn me loose, yuh murderin' robbers! I know who you are. Yo're them Diamondback killers. If Buckaroo and his Crazy Q boys was here you'd sing a different tune."

"Shut up!" growled Diamond Harg, in a disguised voice. "Buckaroo Boone can't even save himself, so he's got a fat chance of helping you. Boys, load Bonanza onto his horse and take him along."

"Stop it!" bawled Bonanza. "Where are yuh takin' me? Turn me loose. I'll give yuh what gold I got. Take this blindfold off my eyes and untie my hands."

"You'll get worse than a blindfold, unless you tell us where them hidden mines are," growled Diamond Harg, grinning again at the efforts of his men to load Bonanza onto a horse. "Take him along, boys. I got other chores to do. I'll meet yuh at our hide-out."

Diamond Harg mounted a big white horse and rode up the steep bank out of the river and over to where Buckaroo was tied to the tree.

The Diamondback leader was a burly, dark-eyed hombre with a cruel, thin-lipped mouth and swarthy complexion. He was dressed entirely in black, except for his fancy, colored silk vest. The pearl handles of his guns showed beneath the tails of his black broadcloth coat as he swung down in front of Buckaroo and grinned at the Crazy Q boss.

"Now it's yore turn, nosey cowboy!" jeered Diamond Harg. "You've butted into my business once too often. Yo're going to die, savvy. I'm killin' you."

CHAPTER II.

RATTLESNAKE SKIN.

DIAMOND HARG took a wet and gleaming rattlesnake skin from his pocket, drew it around Buckaroo's throat and tied it tightly against the cowboy's Adam's apple.

Buckaroo did not flinch, but his stomach crawled with a new dread. That snake skin was the Diamondback killer sign. The wet skin would tighten about his throat as it dried out and would gradually choke him to death.

Whenever the Diamondback killers murdered a man, they always left him with a rattler's hide around his throat.

Stingaree Karns burst out laughing uproariously at the expression on Buckaroo's face. Diamond Harg joined in the mirth.

Buckaroo realized that he was utterly alone with these two killers in the depth of the Shoshone wilderness. The other bandits had gone, taking Bonanza with them. The three slain Indians lay motionless and dead on the hot sand of the river bank.

Over the waving tops of towering pine and fir trees the Crazy Q puncher could see the smoking, fuming spray of Rainbow Falls, pouring over beautifully colored rocks. The sun shining through the flying water tinted the whole horizon with red, yellow, purple, blue, and orange colors.

Bees buzzed in the blossoms, and birds sang among the willow branches. It all seemed very peaceful, yet murder was about to be committed. A massacre had already been done.

Diamond whipped out a knife and stabbed it at Buckaroo's cheek. Jewels glittered on the fingers of his moving hand. The slanting sun cut sparks from an enormous diamond stickpin, set in a border of green emeralds, blue sapphires, and red rubies.

The knife slit the gag from Buckaroo's mouth.

"Now you can yell," jeered Diamond Harg. "I want to hear yuh scream, when yuh begin to choke. It'll pay yuh back for the bullet wounds yuh gave me."

Diamond touched a livid scar on his arm that had just healed. He stabbed a finger at a shoulder, which he still moved stiffly. Buckaroo had put Diamond in the hospital with those bullets, but the Diamondback leader had outfoxed the law and got free again.

Since that time he had been gun-

ning for Buckaroo and his Crazy Q outfit, night and day. They had captured Buckaroo while he was asleep.

"What good will this do yuh?" mumbled Buckaroo, between sore, swollen lips. "Killin' me won't stop Crazy Q vengeance. You'll never win."

He could feel ants crawling over him, biting his flesh. The snakeskin band was so tight around his throat that he kept gulping. Pitch, boiled out of the pine tree by the heat, ran over his arms, his neck, down onto the ropes that held him.

"I like to see yuh squirm," exulted Diamond Harg. "You've licked me every time we fought. For months, you've had me on the run. But now I've got the victory. I'm killing you. And then I'm making old Bonanza tell me where to find his secret mines. I'll be the El Dorado King, after they find Bonanza dead. I'll rule the roost."

Diamond Harg's shoe-button eyes blazed with the mad thirst for power and gold. A brother-in-law of Bonanza McIvor's, Diamond had been wealthy and prosperous, but his ambition was for something greater. He wanted to outshine Bonanza himself.

While they talked, Buckaroo's brain was working swiftly on some plan for escape. It seemed impossible to get away. Each time he tugged at the ropes, Stingaree Karns cut at him with the leaded whip.

Diamond Harg settled himself comfortably among the pine needles, back propped against a tree, and smoked a cigarette. The snake skin was beginning to tighten around Buckaroo's throat. He felt choked. Soon his tongue would swell up, protrude between his teeth, turn black. Then he would die a horrible death.

Stingaree and Diamond laughed and joked and jeered at him. Buckaroo grinned right back at them.

"Yuh might give me a cigarette," muttered Buckaroo. "Might as well smoke here as hereafter."

"You got nerve," admitted Diamond Harg grudgingly. "Stingaree, give him a quirly. Then take our broncs down and water them. This gazebo is going to die hard and take a long time doin' it."

Scowling, Stingaree made a cigarette, placed it between Buckaroo's sore and swollen lips and touched a match to it. Then with sudden savagery he jabbed the hot match into the flesh of Buckaroo's neck.

The cowboy gritted his teeth. A shudder shook him, but he did not let the cigarette fall from his mouth.

His coolness stirred Stingaree to vicious madness. With a flick of his wrist, Stingaree cut the leaded quirt across the cowboy's face, raising welts and oozing wounds.

"That's enough," ordered Diamond Harg, sharply. "You'll hit his eyes and blind him. I don't want his eyes put out—yet. I'll do that myself. Git goin' with them horses. And let 'em drink slow in this hot weather."

Stingaree departed grumbling, and Buckaroo was now entirely alone with his bitterest enemy. Harg fingered his diamonds and slowly cursed Buckaroo Boone for all the harm he had done to the Diamondback desperadoes.

Buckaroo smoked, keeping the cigarette tip glowing, watching his chance. He felt as if he were suffocating. Beads of sweat came out on his forehead. He began to grow weaker.

But now a new hope was flaring up within him. Behind him he could hear the water roaring in the

deep channel fifty feet down from the top of this cliff.

Looking down at his bound wrists he saw where pitch from the pine tree was running over the lasso that held him to the trunk. Here was a chance to get his hands free, if only Diamond Harg would turn away for just a moment.

But Diamond showed no signs of leaving. His gloating look was fixed on Buckaroo's tortured face, upon the eyes that were beginning to bulge, at the neck muscles standing out, the cold sweat on face and forehead.

Suddenly Buckaroo lifted his head as if listening and glanced at a skunk-bush thicket off to the left. He forced a triumphant grin on his twisted face.

It worked. Leaping to his feet, Diamond whirled toward the spot.

At that moment, Buckaroo lowered his head slightly and let the lighted quirly drop down into the fingers of his bound hands. He fumbled the pill, almost dropped it for an agonizing second.

Then his long fingers twisted upward, touched the fiery cigarette tip to the frayed, pitched-soaked rope. A wisp of smoke curled up. The pitched caught on fire, sizzling like a dynamite fuse.

Fire seared Buckaroo's arm and set his clothes to smoking as it ran along the bone-dry, pitch-covered lasso. He hauled his whole body against the rope, felt it give, then fell forward on his face as the strands burned and broke.

His hands, bound in front of him, came up, tore at the rattlesnake band around his throat in vain.

Diamond turned, uttered a yell, and fired. The bullet cut through pine cones close to Buckaroo's body, just as he leaped up and sprang toward the edge of the cliff.

Blindness swept over him. He was choking, tearing at the thong around his throat with bound hands. He thudded against a lodge-pole sapling, bounced off, kept on going, unseeing.

Suddenly he felt himself shooting through space. Back of him a gun was roaring. He barely felt the sting of a bullet across his back.

The swift rush of air, the perilous fall, banished the blindness. He saw water rushing up at him. Cold waves closed in around him, dragging him back to consciousness. He was under the water and being swept along.

Furiously he kicked and worked his bound hands. The snake-skin thong around his throat began to slacken when he tugged at it. The water did that.

He broke the surface and floated a split second on his back, gulping like a landed fish.

Bang! Crack! Br-r-rang! Geysers of spray spurted up all around him.

Up on the bank Diamond was shrieking at the top of his voice as he fired, yelling for Stingaree to come.

Buckaroo, filled with the sudden joy of life, wanted to yell right back, but he saved his breath for another dive. Under he went, holding his breath, letting the stream carry him along.

He could hear the roar of Diamond's gun, but could not see where the bullets hit. He thanked his stars now for the roughness of the country. Up on the river bank the rocks and brush along the edge forced Diamond to turn inland and find a passable trail.

He could follow Diamond's course by the continual howls that came from the outlaw's lips. He was shrieking for Stingaree Karns to come to his assistance.

Buckaroo was swimming on top of the waves now, headed toward a rocky landing. But again his heart sank, as he realized his predicament. What chance had he, with his hands bound, throat garroted, to escape from two relentless mounted killers who had six-guns and rifles?

CHAPTER III.

GUN PLAY.

AT that moment, Buckaroo wished with all his heart that he had taken the other Crazy Q waddies into his confidence. What a glorious sight it would be just to see red-bearded "Smoke" Maguire or fat-faced, smiling "El Gordito" riding up to help him!

But Buckaroo had left his two saddle pards to protect Nona McIvor, Bonanza's daughter, who was searching everywhere for the old prospector.

He had followed Bonanza's trail just to get the old man and take him back to Nona, who intended to carry the silvery-haired gold hunter away to her peaceful ranch in California.

On the trail day and night, he had finally yielded to the sleep of exhaustion. He awakened to find himself helpless in the grip of a half dozen bandits who beat him, and then tied him up.

It had been a bitter pill for the Crazy Q gun boss to swallow. It hurt his pride. He didn't mind being licked in a fair fight, but this time he had been caught like a tame rabbit by Harg's Diamondback desperadoes.

Strictly speaking his was not Buckaroo's battle, anyhow. He found himself wishing that he hadn't butted into the Diamondback war on Bonanza. The rich old prospector should show some sense and run for safety as Nona urged him to do! At least that is what Buckaroo, in his bitterness, thought of it all.

The whole ruckus was a fight by the Diamondbacks to get hold of Bonanza's secret, hidden gold mines. Yet the aged, long-haired prospector denied there were any such mines.

He didn't explain, however, where he got the thousands of dollars he spent on special trains, hiring bands, building more rooms onto the unfinished stone castle deep in the Shoshone wilderness.

Such were the thoughts that flashed through Buckaroo's mind while he was swimming and floating down the swift-flowing river. Up on the high bank he could hear occasional crashing in the brush. Diamond Harg was hot on his trail.

A hundred yards downstream he saw a sandy beach and he headed toward it, swinging in close to shore to avoid being battered against rocks in mid-stream.

A black-clad figure darted out onto that beach, the sun glinting on his pearl-handled guns. Diamond Harg had reached the landing first.

Buckaroo went under the water like a hell-diver, quickly, noiselessly. Despair was in his heart. Diamond was stationed at the narrowest place in the stream. Buckaroo could never float past him.

Cautiously Buckaroo broke the surface of the water with his head and looked toward Diamond. The Diamondback desperado had a six-gun in each hand and was sweeping the river with his eyes.

Willows and swamp grass hid Buckaroo from view. The Crazy Q puncher was close to shore, where the bank slanted up steeply.

His water-filled boots grated on bottom. Quickly he waded ashore, bending low behind alder bushes and Virginia bower thickets. The sloshing of his feet in his watery boots sounded loud as thunder to his ears.

Right in front of him was a very steep incline, thickly armored with skunk bush, hawkweed, barberry, and poison oak.

Buckaroo winced at the thought of plunging into that poison oak, but he had to do it. The poison vine always caused him grief. Once an attack of poison oak had laid him up for a week.

Flat on his stomach he wormed his way under the dense rabbit brush, scaring cottontails in every direction, rousting bevies of noisy quail.

Quail, when suddenly flushed, make more noise than a coyote with the croup. Diamond Harg heard the sound, and he left the river and ran toward the spot.

Rising to his feet, Buckaroo Boone darted back toward the bandit camp. Water squished from his boots at every jump.

Br-r-ree! A bullet glanced off a big maple trunk near his head. Diamond Harg saw him.

Buckaroo's bound hands and water-soaked condition hindered him. But desperation lent speed to his long legs. The water had loosened the thong around his throat, but its tightness forced him to breathe with his mouth wide open.

Clean living and hard range life had trained Buckaroo for the fiercest fighting. In spite of his condition, he left Diamond behind.

"Stingaree!" Diamond Harg's voice rose to a cougar scream. "Get him, Stingaree! Boone's escaped! He's headed for camp."

Out into the open dashed Buckaroo and turned toward the spot where his guns and sombrero lay on the edge of the steep cliff.

He could hear the pounding of hoofs from the direction of the river. Stingaree, who had gone to water the horses, was coming back.

Now Buckaroo was a bare hundred feet from those guns. His lungs seemed about to burst. His eyes burned and felt as if they bulged from their sockets. The water in his boots was like a lead weight.

A slouch-hatted head topped the rise right in front of him. Stingaree's bony, twisted face was under that hat. Stingaree's skinny hand held a roaring, jerking six-gun.

Buckaroo saw the spurts of gun flame and felt the wind of bullets sizzling past him. A slug cut through his boot. Water squirted from the holes made by the bullet.

Stingaree's mustang, fighting the reins, terrified at the sight of the wild-eyed Buckaroo, was headed to run the cowboy down.

Like a man doing a flying tackle, Buckaroo threw himself forward and fell with his hands fumbling with his holstered Colts.

Stingaree's bronc was upon him. He caught a glimpse of shining steel-shod hoofs, of the bronc's chest and belly passing over him.

A rear hoof struck him a glancing blow, knocking him spinning, but now he held a gun tightly clenched in the fingers of one bound hand. Bright streaks of light flashed before his eyes.

Buckaroo felt hot fluid flowing freely down over his forehead, filling his eye sockets, blinding him.

Through a hazy film he saw Stingaree swinging his mustang

around, and he fired. Then magically the bandit and his horse vanished.

A wild howl burst from Stingaree as his wounded bronc reared, plunged forward, and hurled the bandit over the cliff into the water at the spot where Buckaroo had jumped.

Buckaroo tried to move, but he seemed chained to that spot. All he could do was lift that Colt again with both bound hands and turn it on Diamond Harg, who had rounded a clump of brush.

It took all his strength to thumb back the hammer and hold the weapon level as he fired. Diamond halted his mad charge and ducked aside among some boulders.

Down in the river sounded Stingaree's terrified howls: "Save me! I'm drowning. Save me, Diamond! I cain't swim."

Gulping air into his lungs, Buckaroo fought off a deadly faintness. If Diamond knew that he was almost out on his feet, he would finish him quickly.

Buckaroo felt himself choking as the drying snake skin around his throat began to tighten again. Where the ropes held his wrists, the skin was bruised and sore. The kick on the head sickened him. His stomach felt as if it were turning over.

Then he heard something that sent a new thrill of hope through him. Diamond, not anxious to face his hot head, was running to rescue Stingaree. It gave him a good excuse for turning tail.

Buckaroo found his razor-sharp hunting knife, held it between his knees and cut his wrists free. It took but a moment to rip the snake skin from his throat and rub the hot crimson from his face and eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

RATTLESNAKE FARM.

HOW he got his gun, belts, hat and mounted his *bayo coyote* bronc, Buckaroo Boone never quite knew. A *bayo coyote* is a buckskin with dark-stripe markings, the finest and toughest of range horses.

At this moment in his life, Buckaroo Boone had cause to be thankful that he had always treated the buckskin as a wise and knowing trail pardner. His whole appearance was enough to throw any range bronc into a sun-fishing tantrum.

But the *bayo coyote* merely sniffed at the hated odor of human gore, shied away a little, and walled its eyes at the bedraggled, water-soaked, boot-squishing hombre, who reeled and tottered like a scarecrow in a high wind.

When Buckaroo began to slide from the saddle from weakness he looked around and shook its head until bridle chains and snaffles rattled.

Startled by this narrow escape, Buckaroo shook out his lasso and slowly and painfully tied himself in the hull. Even if he fainted, the pony would take him home.

"Git along, Flea-bite, old boy," muttered Buckaroo. "Giddap!"

His lift of the reins sent the buckskin moving at a running walk. Buckaroo felt sharp, stabbing pains through his head at every movement of the mustang. Cold sweat oozed out on his forehead.

He felt himself drifting in a sea of darkness. Then he was sitting on a cloud going up—up—up until a snow-clad mountain peak slapped him in the face and shocked him back to consciousness.

He even felt the cold of the snow. But a moment later, he saw it was watery spray splashed from a river

crossing in his face, and not snow at all.

The *bayo coyote* horse was making the crossing of his own accord, headed for home.

Buckaroo's fingers closed on the fine mane of the pony.

"Bless yore ornery hide!" he muttered. "I allus knowed a horse had as much sense as a man. Whoa-up, old boy! Here's where we stop a mite."

Swinging the pony into a thicket beside the stream, Buckaroo untied himself, removed his clothes, and plunged into the icy water. The wetness of his garments had made him sick. But this biting plunge washed the red stains from his face and stirred up his blood.

While he let his pain-racked brain and body soak, his clothes were drying on the rocks. All but his boots. He put them back on right away, or he never would have been able to don them.

Buckaroo never took his eyes off the buckskin horse. He watched those sensitive ears for a warning of any one's approach.

Overhead, a mountain breeze made music in the treetops. A brook tinkled over pebbles. He gave a start when a grouse started to drum in a fir tree, then grinned.

In the clear, hot mountain air, the sun beat down so fiercely that the wood smelled as if it were being baked in an oven. The acrid, overpowering odor of a tar weed filled his nostrils.

He wondered how far he had come. Where were Diamond Harg and Stingaree Karns? He laughed a little as he pictured Diamond pulling Stingaree out of the river. Perhaps it was that rescue which had delayed them.

He shuddered to think what would have happened if they had caught up with him when he was unconscious.

Buckaroo was not idle as he doctored his wounds, dried his clothes and let the buckskin graze and refresh itself for a long ride. By the time he was in the saddle again, his plans were made.

He swung the horse around and headed right back toward the enemy. Not until he picked up the trail of the bandits who had taken Bonanza, did he start down into the valley again, this time riding sign.

A song was in his heart, a song of high hope, the thrill of coming battle. With three six-guns, a rifle, and a fast horse, he felt ready to defy a half dozen men.

The trail led into an awesome canyon, walled in by great red sandstone barriers so high that he almost had to look twice to see the top.

From under the *rosadero* he pulled his Winchester, levered a cartridge into the chamber, set the hammer at half cock. Huge boulders littered this canyon which was known as Titanic Pass, because of its magnificent scenery.

"If they're leavin' a rear guard," mused Buckaroo, "here's where he'll be to stop pursuit or spying."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth before he saw a hat bob up behind a pink crag shaped like a bear. A rifle flashed in the sun.

Crack! Buckaroo's shot, fired as he swung his bronc's head clear of the rifle barrel, was a bit quicker than the dry-gulcher's.

A swarthy jasper rolled out from behind the stone bear and sprawled on the trail. The top of his head was shattered.

Buckaroo did not even stop. The enemy could not be far ahead. Jabbing in the dulled spur rowels, he prodded his horse to a gallop, rifle held at the ready.

No more shots came. Only the echoes of his bronc's hoofbeats came from the towering walls of the mighty gorge.

He passed one of nature's giant carvings, a huge red cathedral, complete with towers, gables, and Gothic windows, and found himself dropping down into a great cup in the mountains.

"I've got 'em," exulted Buckaroo, glancing at the barren ridges that formed a rim around this cup, completely encircling it. "They can't go over any of them ridges without sky-lighting themselves. All I got to do is wait and watch them slopes."

High up above timber line, foliage was scarce. To get out of the valley, the bandits would have to emerge into this open space.

A turn in the trail brought Buckaroo in sight of a group of log buildings, visible through the foliage which hid him. All the houses were deserted except one. There were stacks of hay, barns apparently filled with grain, a few cattle and horses.

A queer, black-whiskered hermit known as "Porcupine" ran the place that was once an Overland stagecoach-supply depot.

Tying his bronc, Buckaroo approached close to the nearest house on foot. He saw a bearlike man, his entire features covered with prickly black whiskers. Porcupine was coming out of a grain shed, carrying a wire mouse trap in which the cowboy could see a number of little gray mice.

Swiftly, silently, gun in hand, lasso looped over his shoulder, Buckaroo closed in on Porcupine. He wanted to question the hermit, without his approach being seen by others.

Right in front of him a big-hatted figure rose from behind a wild raspberry bush and leveled a six-gun at Porcupine.

Buckaroo threw down with his own gun, covering the skulker. Then remembering that a shot might warn the Diamondbacks in the valley, he grabbed his rope instead and shot out a loop.

The lasso snaked the skulker around the shoulders and hurled the party to the ground. Instantly Buckaroo grabbed the fallen person, who had uttered a sharp gasp.

A girl lay propped up there in the skunk brush against which she had fallen. Her hat was off. Dark hair fell around an olive face and framed large black, startled eyes. It was Nona McIvor, dressed as a cowboy.

"Bust my galluses!" said Buckaroo Boone, easing off the rope and lifting Nona to her feet. "You was hid by the chaparral. Say, where the blazes are them Crazy Q punchers that were to pertect you?"

Buckaroo spoke in a low tone so that Porcupine could not hear. The black-whiskered hermit was over in a sort of rock garden, filled with various shaped stones which he had picked up from the mountain gorges.

Nona's dark eyes blazed with anger for a moment. Her olive cheeks flamed red. As the rich daughter of Bonanza McIvor, she was not used to such treatment. Then abruptly her anger gave way to a tragic look.

"Where's dad?" she whispered, catching Buckaroo's arm. "Have you found him? I know the Diamondback killers must have him. He's been gone for days and not even Chief Lone Hawk, his guard, knows where he is? You're all scarred up. You've been in a fight. Did they kill my father?"

"Easy, easy," soothed Buckaroo Boone. "I'll find Bonanza all right.

In fact, I've got a line on him. Please don't worry. But you ain't answered my questions. Have them worthless Crazy Q rannies left you unprotected?"

Nona McIvor managed a smile. She was pretty that way, or any other way, Buckaroo thought. Tall, dark-eyed, with glossy black hair and full olive cheeks, she was a real Western girl, in spite of her wealth.

Bonanza had bought her a peaceful ranch far away in California, but she would not leave the wild and woolly Shoshone wilderness as long as her salty old dad was in danger.

Bonanza, for his part, was dead set against civilization. When neighbors got within fifty miles of him, things were getting too crowded. He swore he'd never let Nona take him to safety. He was going to live and die a grizzly of the rim rocks.

"Smoke Maguire and El Gordito," said Nona. "Oh, they've stuck to me like porous plaster. But half an hour ago, they saw a party of Diamondback killers and gave chase. I promised I'd hide here and not move until they got back."

"Yipee!" chuckled Buckaroo Boone. "Them tadpoles seen the very cutthroats that ambushed me. Here's where we wipe out the rest of them Diamondbacks. Which way did Smoke and El Gordito go?"

"I don't know," said Nona. "They told me to listen for shots. Then I'd know when they flushed the buzzards. One thing is certain. The bandits must be miles from here by now. It was two hours ago."

Buckaroo had been keeping his eyes on the high, barren ridges. Nothing had moved up there.

"The Diamondbacks are still in the valley," he thought. Aloud he said: "Let's go over and have Porcupine show us his snake farm. He's got the biggest collection of reptiles in the West. He may even supply them Diamondback killers with the skins they use for chokin' their victims to death. Besides, I could shore stand one of Porky's famous mulligan stews and a big cup of coffee."

CHAPTER V.

A RATTLER STRIKES.

A NATURAL rock pit in Porcupine's front yard was filled with snakes of all kinds. They squirmed along the walls in the shade. Water snakes swam in the murky green pool. Rattlesnakes twisted their way into a stone cave that formed part of the reptile den.

In the summer black-bearded Porcupine served meals to weary travelers in an arbor on the edge of this pit. A huge black coffeepot steamed on an open fire. A pot of stew bubbled, as it cooked.

Porcupine was a shifty-eyed, squirmy, talkative jasper, but his food, tin cups and plates were clean.

"Just look at them reptiles," boasted Porcupine, as he poured hot coffee and dished out the stew for Buckaroo and Nona. "I ketched every one of them myself. I charge a dollar for a meal. For an extra peso, I put on my snake show. Folks say they never seen nothing like it."

Buckaroo kept his eyes on the open ridges as he ate, watching for the first sign of the fleeing Diamondbacks. He tossed some coins to Porcupine and told him to put on his snake show. Something was wrong here.

Hoofmarks showed him that a large party of riders had been at this camp. The Diamondbacks had halted here. Buckaroo didn't trust

Porcupine; so he asked no questions.

The black-bearded hermit moved around among the twisting, writhing heaps of snakes, which seemed to like to crawl over one another and squirm about one another's coils.

Yellow-striped garter snakes, blue racers, spreading vipers, and water snakes crawled right over the coils of deadly rattlers and cottonmouth moccasins without even provoking a hiss.

Nona gave a little scream as Porcupine picked up a seven-foot indigo snake and twined it around his neck and shoulders.

"You cowboys don't know much about snakes," challenged Porcupine, blinking his eyes rapidly at Buckaroo. Porky seemed very jumpy and uneasy. He kept glancing off toward the mountains as if he knew the Diamondbacks were hiding somewhere out there. "Only an ignoramus would think that a rattler won't crawl over a hair rope. There's one right among them snakes. They crawl all over it."

"But what do you do with all those snakes?" asked Nona, who welcomed anything that would take her mind off of her missing father for a moment. "Do you ever sell them?"

"I shore do," said Porcupine. "Do yuh want to buy a nice king snake or coach whip? A snake's mighty interesting to study, miss. They sleep with their eyes open. And they hear with the tips of their tongues. Yuh cain't find nothin' more mysterious than them."

Porcupine got busy blowing up a hog bladder, which he finally tied in the shape of a balloon. Buckaroo noted Porky's evil, sidelong glances and he shifted his gun around within easier reach.

Too late he regretted letting Nona McIvor in for this trouble.

"Just look at that big king snake," babbled Porcupine. His finger pointed to a beautiful black fellow with a pattern of yellow chains on his scales. "He's a fighter. He'll rid yore place of rats in no time. And in the open he'll kill rattlesnakes. Kills little ones in here sometimes and eats 'em, but I never lets 'em get very hungry. Pizen-snake bites don't faze a king. Two dollars is the price, miss. And he's a bargain at that."

"Do yuh ever sell any diamondbacks?" drawled Buckaroo Boone.

Now he was sure that this was the place where the Diamondback killers must get all the snake skins, which they used to choke their victims.

Porcupine's eyes glittered suspiciously as they met Buckaroo's. Then without answering he placed a forked stick over the heart-shaped head of a big rattlesnake, reached down and picked up the viper.

With gloating glee he forced the venomous fanged jaws open and, using a tally pencil, he pushed the sickly white folds of flesh back from the needle-sharp fangs. When he held the pencil up, it bore a drop of bright yellow fluid—the venom.

"Shore I sell diamondbacks," said Porcupine, with sudden defiance. "What's wrong with that? I'd like to see anybody stop me."

Buckaroo shrugged and turned his eyes on the barren ridges, where there was still no sign of bandit movements.

Porcupine replaced the big rattler on the ground and dangled the blown-up hog bladder in front of it. With a *b-r-r-r* of dry rattles, the snake writhed into a mottle, vibrating coil!

"Watch the rattler's head now,"

gurgled Porcupine. "See if yore eye is quick enough to foller it."

The snake struck. But even Buckaroo's keen eyes did not see the lightning-swift move. The bladder burst with a *pop* as the snake's fangs punctured it.

Porcupine whooped with joy. He defied them to find a better snake show anywhere.

But Buckaroo Boone did not even hear him. His gaze was fixed on something that dangled from the brushy top of chaparral that bordered the near-by trail. *It was a coonskin cap.* Bonanza's cap!

Quickly Buckaroo glanced away for fear Nona would follow his glance and see the tragic sign. The old gold miner had been brought this way. The Diamondbacks had halted here. Porcupine knew about it, and that was what made him so jumpy, so eager to hold their attention.

As a finish to his snake show, Porcupine dumped a cage full of mice into the den. Instantly the snakes became a writhing, heaving mass, squirming in all directions.

"Watch them coach whips," yelped Porcupine. "They're the fastest snake in the den. The black snakes are purty fast, too."

A black meteor of speed trapped a terrified mouse. It's gaping, dark mouth struck, closing over the mouse's nose. Then began the work of swallowing the mouse, which soon made a bulge in the snake's middle.

Up on a barren ridge Buckaroo saw two riders. Even at that distance he could not miss the bright silver trappings of El Gordito's *charro* costume, reflecting the sun's rays. A distant gunshot sounded.

Buckaroo saw Smoke Maguire's horse go down, in the split second before he darted toward his own pony, dragging Nona after him by the hand.

"Come on!" yelped Buckaroo. "The Diamondbacks. My Crazy Q boys have found the Diamondback killers."

Instinct told him to look back. Porcupine was awkwardly tugging at a gun caught on his waistband.

"Don't shoot," he howled, when Buckaroo covered him. "I'm going after them outlaws, too. Don't kill me, Buckaroo. I'm a friend of the Crazy Q."

"The blasted liar," growled the Crazy Q boss. "I wish he'd draw and give me an excuse to drill that brush patch he calls a face. He's treacherous as a cotton-mouth moccasin."

CHAPTER VI.

GUN FIGHT.

LEAVING Nona hidden in the chaparral, Buckaroo mounted his *bayo coyote* horse and raced to the scene of battle. The distant roar of guns told him the fight was a hot one. Six outlaws pitted against two Crazy Q riders!

Up the steep slope he urged his pony. Tall pines and firs concealed his approach until he reached timber line. Here the plants were scrubby and far apart.

Five of the desperadoes, one wounded, were in flight before Buckaroo came in sight of them. A glance back of him told him why. Black smoke was pouring from Porcupine's camp fire down in the valley. It was a signal, Buckaroo felt sure.

"Stop and fight!" bawled Buckaroo Boone, swinging his rifle around and firing at the fugitives. "Halt, you yaller murderers! What have you done with Bonanza?"

Two outlaws swung their mustangs about on seeing that Buckaroo

was alone. The yells of El Gordito and Smoke came from just over a ridge.

Buckaroo's Winchester began to talk. Its sharp crack sounded above the deeper roar of the bandit's six-guns. A slug stung the *bayo coyote*, causing it to swerve. Another bullet neatly clipped a gold coin from the cowboy's hat band.

Buckaroo centered his sights on a zigzagging, bobbing horseman and squeezed trigger. The cutthroat fell forward across his saddle horn, dropping his gun. But he managed to stick with his horse. The other outlaw fled with the wounded man.

"Smoke—El Gordito!" howled Buckaroo. "Come this way! The Diamondbacks are getting away."

Two riders came fogging over the crest of a low knoll. Smoke Maguire, runty, red-whiskered, peppery, was forking a horse captured from a slain Diamondbacker. El Gordito, in all the glory of his bright-colored clothes and silver-spangled sombrero, rode his flashy pinto.

At sight of Buckaroo Boone both Crazy Q waddies waved their headpieces and whooped with delight.

"Yuh old tarantula!" shouted Smoke Maguire. "What prairie-dog hole did you crawl out of?"

El Gordito's plump olive face was wreathed in a wide smile as he and Smoke swung in on either side of Buckaroo.

"Amigo!" yelped the little fat man. "We look for you everywhere, *compadre mio*."

As they talked, the Crazy Q trio were hot on the trail of the fleeing desperadoes. Occasional shots came back at them. They fired at glimpses of moving figures in the brush.

"Where is Bonanza?" roared Buckaroo, to make himself heard above the thunder of guns. "Them crooks had him prisoner. But he ain't with them now. Did you fellers rescue him?"

"Nary a rescue," retorted Smoke Maguire. "Look. Them killers are separating. Each one headin' in a different direction."

"Fan out, boys," ordered Buckaroo. "Each one of you pick his man. Don't let any of them get away. Take a prisoner if you can, so's we can force him to tell where old Bonanza's been hid."

It was easier said than done. Here was the roughest section of all the Shoshone wilderness. Crisscrossing gorges cut the ridges in every direction. In the growing darkness, the pinnacles and domes everywhere loomed black and majestic.

Buckaroo came to a slippery path that skirted a thousand-foot cliff. One stumble of his pony might hurl him to eternity onto the jagged rocks far below.

The fugitives seemed to know every path. Buckaroo heard the thunder of a gun close by, recognized Smoke's war cry that did not drown out a death shriek of the slain bandit.

"Blast it," bellowed Smoke, "I wanted to take him prisoner!"

Ahead of Buckaroo an outlaw dismounted on a craggy ledge above a tumbling, white-capped torrent. Here above timber line a few runty spruces lay flat on the ground like vines. There were low twisted birches, straggling grass, mosses, a profusion of gorgeously colored flowers.

Fierce winds struck Buckaroo so hard that it threatened to sweep horse and rider over the rim. In deep crevices lay long, white, winding streaks of snow, packed down so deep, hundreds and hundreds of feet, that even the hottest sun

would not melt it during the whole summer.

Beside one of these slippery snow paths Buckaroo leaped off his horse, jerked the animal into a boulder patch and began shooting at the bandit on the ledge.

Hunkering down behind a stone, the outlaw fired back. A slug clipped off Buckaroo's boot heel, throwing him off balance.

The wet ground gave way and he fell, sliding, dropping his rifle. He felt cold snow under him. Before he knew it he was shooting like a toboggan down that icy crevice.

Buckaroo's nose dug into the hard-packed snow, bringing tears to his eyes. He had to release his hold on his guns and fling both arms around his face to protect it.

Sliding downward at express-train speed, he couldn't even try to protect himself. All he could do was hug his face and let his body be battered as it swung this way and that, spun around and turned in the dizzy, whirling descent.

Vaguely Buckaroo realized that bullets were thudding into the icy chute all around him. The man on the crag was firing at him.

But Buckaroo could do nothing. His Colts were gone. Only his triggerless fanning gun was still under his belt, and it jabbed fiercely into his flesh every time he fell on it.

Suddenly Buckaroo felt himself shooting through air. He hit on his back with a thump and picked up speed.

Death stared him in the face. Would he plunge over a canyon rim onto the rocks? Or was this carrying him down into some glacier-carved pit where he would freeze to death before any one could rescue him?

Buckaroo had plenty of time to think of dying, in those long, terrible minutes. The ice-filled clefts were gigantic fissures in a vast expanse of desolation. They twisted and turned and sometimes dropped hundreds of feet at a time.

At any minute he expected to go sailing head first over one of these long drops. He would hit on the hard snow. If it did not kill him, he would lie there helpless to die with broken arms and legs. To make matters worse, it was getting dark.

At times he tried using his feet, his hands as brakes but his finger nails wouldn't even dig into that icy snow.

Another thought struck him and sent a shudder through him. El Gordito and Smoke would never know what had happened. His wild slide to death would leave no sign they could follow. And neither of them had seen him fall into the crevasse.

The snow got softer. He could feel the wetness creeping over him. It became slush, into which he could dig his boot heels and fingers. He grabbed a protruding boulder and brought himself to a stop with a wrench that made him see stars.

For a moment, he could only cling there, gasping air into his tortured lungs and throat.

Finally he was able to lift his head and look around. What he saw below him, sent a surge of joy through him. A few hundred feet down there the snow became an icy torrent of water that tumbled over a precipice into a flower-bordered lake, mysterious in the gloom.

Once more that day Buckaroo Boone had to use cold water to restore his battered body and hammered brain back to full consciousness.

His belt, holsters, cartridges were still with him. He pulled out his triggerless Colt and dried it off.

Both his spurs had been torn off, but his boots were all right, except for the lost heel.

Best of all when he stood up, he found he could walk. As he started away across a field of wild flowers, he remembered that his big Stetson with its gold-coin band had dropped from his head up where El Gordito and Smoke would be likely to find it. They would get the *bayo coyote* cayuse, too, despite the concealing darkness of night.

"There's bound to be a settlement in such a fine meadow," he exulted. "Boy, I ought ter thank my stars. I bet I'm the only man who went down one of them glacier holes and came out alive."

He saw lights ahead and opened his mouth to yell. Then he thought better of it.

Cautiously he approached the clearing, gun in hand, limping, wincing at every move of his battered body. He saw a big barn, some corrals, sheds, and then a long, low, rambling log house with a huge shale chimney from which smoke was pouring. Yellow lamplight glowed through broken, dirty windowpanes.

Riders were milling around the doorway. Buckaroo did not know any of them. Probably it was a friendly ranch.

He took a step forward almost into the open. Then jerked back.

A shout went up from the men at the ranch. Two horsemen came tearing in among them. One was black-clad Diamond Harg; the other, skeleton-faced, sneering Stingaree Karns, with his leaded cat-o'-nine-tails lash gripped in a skinny paw. Even in the dusk he recognized them.

Behind Diamond Harg galloped the licked and wounded Diamondbacks, who had escaped from the Crazy Q pards in the fight.

But Buckaroo Boone looked in vain among all of them for silvery-haired old Bonanza McIvor.

"What have they done with Bonanza?" muttered Buckaroo. "Smoke and El Gordito said they didn't rescue him. And he ain't with them Diamondbacks. Maybe they've killed him. Or hid him away somewheres to die with a snake skin around his throat."

CHAPTER VII.

BANDIT HIDE-OUT.

"WHERE'S the man I left in charge here?" roared Diamond Harg. "Step forward. I want to see yuh."

A shaggy hombre stepped up to Diamond. Instantly a spurt of flame leaped from Harg's gun. The bandit straw boss uttered a death shriek, stumbled forward, and fell on his face.

"That'll teach you skunks to obey orders!" snarled Diamond. "Get sentries out there, like I told yuh to do. And be quick about it. The Crazy Q ain't far away, and they're on the prod. I'm offering a hundred dollars to the first man who plugs Buckaroo Boone or takes him prisoner. All the rest of yuh come into the house."

Crouched in the brush, gun in hand, Buckaroo watched the sentries hurry away. The nearest took his station at the main entrance which could be closed by a huge gate made of newly hewn pine.

A tall, husky jasper in yellow goatskin chaps and a red felt hat began to pace back and forth at the rear of the house, not far from Buckaroo. He shouted to a man named "Clubfoot," who called the sentry Ches when he answered.

Through the dirty windows of the big living room Buckaroo could see Diamond Harg and Stingaree gathering the rest of the cutthroats around a long table. But he was too far away to hear or see much.

"I've got to get closer," he grumbled, edging through the brush toward Ches. "I must know where they've hid ol' Bonanza, and what's happened to Smoke and El Gordito."

Rising boldly he strode toward the sentry in the darkness. Ches whirled around with leveled gun.

"Who is that?" he barked.

Buckaroo was limping. He was just a dark blur in the night blackness.

"Huh!" grunted Buckaroo, imitating the gravelly voice of the man known as Clubfoot. "Wouldn't yuh know yore pard, Clubfoot?"

His long legs had carried him swiftly up to Ches, who started to lower his gun.

"Oh, hello," grumbled Ches. "It's you. Say, give me the makin's."

Buckaroo reached back as if to get a sack from his hip pocket. With his eyes fixed on Ches's jaw he let fly with a flashing uppercut.

Knuckles cracked against jawbone. Ches, knocked backward, stumbled once before he crumpled.

Catching the falling man, Buckaroo steered him into a pile of high grass and quickly grabbed his guns, yellow chaps and red hat. He looked around and located Ches's tied horse, while he bound and gagged the unconscious bandit.

Thus disguised he hurried over to an open window and looked in, his fanning gun trained on Diamond Harg.

A strange sight greeted him. Diamond had upended a gunny sack on the long table. Gold pieces, nuggets, yellow bars, jewels, handsome guns, loot of all description poured out on the surface.

"Divide it inter twelve parts," ordered Diamond Harg. "The Crazy Q is too close to here for safety. We're driftin' to our new hide-out. All of yuh know where that is."

"What about Bonanza?" demanded Stingaree Karns, flourishing his lead-tipped whip.

Buckaroo leaned forward and listened intently for the reply. He must learn the hiding place of old Bonanza.

"Let him stew where he is," snorted Diamond Harg. "When we git back to him, he'll be softened up enough to talk plenty. The minute we find his hidden mines, that will be soon enough to kill him."

Buckaroo gritted his teeth. Never had he heard such cold-hearted plotting. Not content with robbing Bonanza, the Diamondbacks intended to murder him.

The loot was quickly divided. But not a word was said that told him the whereabouts of Bonanza McIvor. All the men were called in, given their share, told to saddle up ready to leave.

"Call in Ches," ordered Diamond Harg. "He's walkin' sentry post at the back of the house. Send a man to take his place."

Buckaroo's heart stood still. They were coming for him. In the darkness at a distance his disguise was good enough. But he could never walk into that room and claim Ches's loot.

A man came to the back door, flung it open and looked out. There on the step loomed the powerful, black-clad figure of Diamond Harg himself.

Buckaroo's gun in the darkness lifted to cover the cruel, sneering face, then dropped until it focused

on the diamond stickpin framed in red, blue and green gems.

One shot would blast out Diamond's life and end this war. It was a strong temptation. But still Buckaroo could not bring himself to shoot even a bandit from ambush.

"Come in here, Ches," ordered Diamond Harg. "We're dividin' up the swag and lammin' out of here. The Crazy Q is on our trail. A man will stand yore watch until we're ready to scoot."

Buckaroo, staying back in the dark, grumbled something under his breath. A gasp of relief escaped him when Diamond withdrew. But a moment later his gun came up when another jasper came toward him through the tall grass.

"I'm in fer it," thought Buckaroo. "I might as well shoot my way out, grab a horse and try to git to Bonanza McIvor. I think I know where he's hid, now."

A yell was on the cowboy's lips and his Colt was ready to throw down on the approaching rowdy, when there was an interruption.

A sentry burst into the ranch house living room.

"The Crazy Q!" he shouted. "They're comin' down the trail—two of them—with a gal. Come on, boys, we'll wipe 'em out!"

At that instant the relief man recognized Buckaroo as a stranger and drew his gun. The Crazy Q boss shot the bandit down, leaped over his body and darted toward Ches's horse.

Out in front of the bandit den, gunmen were swinging into saddles, obeying Diamond's barked commands.

Buckaroo pulled loose the tie rope on Ches's bronc, tightened the cinch and popped into the saddle with the mustang already moving.

Straight toward the main gate he galloped, with Diamond's angry protest ringing in his ears. The big white pine board gate stood open.

"Get him!" shrieked Stingaree Karns. "That ain't Ches. I can tell the way he rides. Shoot him!"

Bullets clipped past Buckaroo as he tore through the gateway and headed up the trail toward the approaching Crazy Q cowboys.

Hoofs drummed and thundered on the hard-packed trail behind him. But now no more shots came. The Diamondbacks did not want to warn the rest of the Crazy Q of their pursuit.

Buckaroo elevated his Colt and fired three shots, a signal of danger to his approaching pards. Nona was with them. That made it all the worse.

Around a turn in the trail he raced, howling at the top of his voice.

"Git goin', Crazy Q! High-tail it! This is Buckaroo. The Diamondbacks are ridin'."

Another turn brought him into the midst of three riders, one a dark-haired girl. Smoke and El Gordito were both trying to get Nona to flee. But she wouldn't leave them. She had a small gun in her hand and wanted to help them fight and find her father.

Smoke's short pipe was going like a chimney. El Gordito's fat olive cheeks gleamed with sweat as he gestured with his big, silver-mounted, steeple-crowned sombrero.

All this Buckaroo saw by the moonlight there on the mountain trail, while Smoke was handing him his gold-banded Stetson which he had lost.

"Nona," said Buckaroo, "you go up the trail to the next bend and guard our rear. Keep in the woods out of sight. Smoke! El Gordito!

Up and at 'em! We'll run them coyotes back into their holes.

Nona obeyed Buckaroo. Side by side, the Crazy Q pards charged back at the surprised outlaws. Caught in a narrow place on the trail, the bandits milled in terror as the Crazy Q riders opened up.

Buckaroo emptied one saddle, wounded another man. Smoke and El Gordito were fighting demons.

In a panic, the bandits fled back to their hide-out. Wounded men shrieked. Above the screams of the injured sounded Diamond Harg's howls and oaths.

Buckaroo shouted a command to halt, when the last of the outlaws darted inside the yard and slammed the big white gate closed.

"Hold up!" roared Buckaroo. "Don't let them shoot yuh from cover. I'll plant my brand on 'em. Then we'll go find Bonanza McIvor."

From under his belt Buckaroo produced his triggerless fanning gun. Holding it steady, he fanned the hammer with his left palm. The shots made a dark circle on the pine gate.

Then with one of his other guns he used six shots to put a tail onto the "O", making it a Q, the Boone ranch brand.

After which the exultant Crazy Q waddies rode away, hurling back taunts at the demoralized Diamondbacks.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HUNT FOR BONANZA.

BUCKAROO led the flight away from the bandit stronghold. Smoke and El Gordito wanted to stay and do battle. They complained and threatened.

But Buckaroo picked up Nona on the trail and kept on going. He wouldn't answer questions.

In the moonlight the wild country seemed even more vast and mysterious than in the daytime. The snowy peaks of the tallest mountains seemed like unlighted Christmas candles in a forest of evergreens.

Spires, pinnacles and domes were transformed into live ghosts that actually appeared to move. The echo of hoofbeats in the narrow gorges sounded very loud.

There was no sound of pursuit behind them. The Diamondbacks did not relish a stand-up fight. And they did not know how many were in the Crazy Q posse.

Three hours of hard riding brought the Crazy Q and Nona to Porcupine's snake farm. Here Buckaroo made a proposition that brought loud protests from Nona and the others.

"We're goin' to bed down here," he said, as they approached the black-bearded snake raiser, who sat on his stoop in the moonlight. "Porcupine's squaw is cleanly. She has good rooms for travelers. Nona will be safe in one of them. Us boys will take our shut-eye in the hay."

"Nothin' doin'," burst out Smoke Maguire. "If this is what yuh dragged me away from a good fight for, then I quit."

"*Seguro!*" grunted El Gordito. "To-night ees good for keel bandits. The moon she ees ver' bright."

"I agree with the boys," said Nona. "Why should we turn in so early. I can't sleep. Not with my father lost. Now I know the Diamondbacks have him."

"Yuh got to trust me," said Buckaroo Boone sternly. "I've never failed any of yuh yet. When I make my play with Porcupine, you've got to back me up."

No word of protest was uttered when Buckaroo arranged for them

to put up at Porcupine's place. The black-beard called his squaw, who took Nona to her room. Buckaroo made sure she could lock her door and barricade it, before he bade her a smiling good night.

Over in a shed, the Crazy Q trio piled down on straw, Buckaroo with his eye to a big crack in the rough board wall. For long minutes he lay there, waiting, hoping that his plan would work. Suddenly a triumphant exclamation escaped him.

"Snore, boys," he growled, "like yuh never snored before! Porky is spyin' on us. Make him think we're asleep."

Smoke's snore was a rattling basso. El Gordito reached soprano notes on his best efforts. Buckaroo gurgled and snorted, with his eye fixed to that crack.

"There he goes," muttered Buckaroo. "Ridin'. Let him get out of hearing before we make any racket. El Gordito, you saddle up the broncs again. Smoke, come with me."

At a run Buckaroo headed for the ranch house. The squaw had retired. There was a light in Nona's room.

The Crazy Q boss found a pair of hip boots, some candles, and a stick before he darted toward the snake pit, with Smoke muttering and grumbling beside him.

From a bush near some steps leading down into the pit Buckaroo plucked something and held it up. It was Bonanza's coonskin cap.

"You stand guard here," ordered Buckaroo, peeling off his boots and putting on the hip boots. "I'm goin' down into that snake pit."

"What the blazes yuh going to do that fer?" burst out Smoke. "Yo're loco! You've had a tech of the sun."

Buckaroo was already descending the steps among the writhing, seething reptiles. Diamondbacks rattled and struck at him. He brushed them aside with his stick, or warded them off with his rubber boots.

Stooping low, he entered the dark stone grotto, which he had observed on his other visit to the snake pit. The rattling of snakes sounded louder.

Then to his ears came another, a more horrible sound, something like a human groan. Something moved there in the grotto, which was as large as a small cave.

A match flared in Buckaroo's fingers. He saw Bonanza's haggard old face and long, silvery hair, even before he touched the match to the candle.

A gag was in the old man's mouth. His arms were tied behind him.

He was perched on a lone rock which formed a sort of island in a sea of rattlesnakes. Buckaroo could feel their fangs thudding against the rubber of his hip boots. The odor from them was sickening.

Buckaroo's knife flashed. In an instant he had cut the gag from Bonanza's lips and wrists and had the little old fellow in his arms, carrying him.

"Bless yuh!" croaked Bonanza, through tortured lips. "How did yuh ever know I was hid here?"

"I saw your coonskin cap near the steps leadin' down into the pit," growled Buckaroo. "But I never ketched on that you was hid in this grotto, until I found the Diamondbacks had left yuh cached away somewheres."

Smoke Maguire let out an amazed yell and almost fell into the snake pit at sight of Bonanza.

"Hoppity horned toads!" cried Smoke. "Where did yuh git him?

What made yuh think he was down in there, Buckaroo?"

El Gordito came galloping up, with their saddled horses. Behind him rode Nona McIvor, defiantly waving a gun and announcing that she was not going to sleep through a fight.

At sight of her father, a sob burst from her lips. A flying dismount landed her beside old Bonanza, who for once in his life was willing to let his daughter's strong arms support him.

"Drop down!" yelled Buckaroo, suddenly. "The Diamondback raiders! Gun 'em."

Diamond Harg, his face masked, was in the lead of the savage rowdies who charged straight at the Crazy Q, guns roaring. On either side of Diamond was black-whiskered Porcupine and skinny Stingaree Karns.

Buckaroo grabbed Nona and her dad and dragged them down behind some rocks, before he caught up the reins of his mustang.

El Gordito and Smoke, already mounted, were wheeling their ponies around and triggering hot lead. Buckaroo did not have his *bayo coyote* bronc, but Ches's mustang.

At the first volley, this mustang dropped to its forelegs, then rolled over squealing and making horrible sounds. Buckaroo wasted a mercy shot to put it out of its misery, then blazed away with both guns at the circling outlaws. Porcupine fell at his first volley.

Without a horse, Buckaroo had to fight on foot. The other Crazy Q waddies were wheeling about among the trees, using them for cover while they fired through open spaces.

Kneeling down beside the snake den Buckaroo took careful aim in the moonlight, picking his man each time. The darkness made accurate shooting difficult.

But Buckaroo took his time and began to empty saddles. He saw Stingaree Karns grab at his chest and ride away into the brush, moaning.

Then a mounted demon charged straight toward him. It was Diamond Harg.

Buckaroo's shot, aimed at Diamond, brought down the outlaw's horse.

Diamond lit a-running, straight at Buckaroo. Both men blazed and missed.

They were so close to each other that the spurts of fire licked at Buckaroo like the darting tongues of a serpent.

Buckaroo suddenly found himself falling. The stunning shot in the shoulder was such a shock that he actually felt no pain. He dropped to the ground and rolled to the edge of the snake pit.

He had to drop his gun in order to grab a sapling and save himself from falling among the rattlesnakes. Now he was moving automatically. He seemed numbed all over.

Instinct, the stabbing fear of death, alone stirred him to action.

With a howl of triumph, Diamond leaped toward him, both guns lowered to fire. Bullets cut up the ground all around Buckaroo Boone.

Over beyond the pit he could hear the triumphant howls of Smoke and El Gordito, who had the bandits on the run.

Buckaroo's fingers fumbled out his triggerless Colt. In a panic he fanned the hammer. The big gun bucked and jumped as it unraveled a string of sudden death.

A bullet hit Diamond, spun him around. Then Buckaroo heard something that filled him with hor-

rible dread. His Colt- hammer clicked on dead shells. And Diamond, although stumbling, was still on his feet.

Buckaroo's bullet had stunned Diamond, who reeled, wabbled, and suddenly plunged over into the snake pit. There was a horrible rattling and hissing. A wild shriek burst from Diamond Harg.

"They've got me! The rattlesnakes are biting me to death. I'm being killed by rattlers!" The murderer's howls were frantic.

"Diamond's down!" bellowed Buckaroo. "I got the Diamondback leader. The war is over."

Diamond Harg's shrieks had died in a gurgle, that ended in a sound like the death rattle in a man's throat.

Panic-stricken at Diamond's downfall the rest of the desperadoes fled in confusion. The Crazy Q victory seemed complete.

Only the threatening buzz of excited rattlesnakes broke the stillness that settle down over the Wilderness. Once more peace reigned in the Shoshone wilderness.

RUNNING M

THE BAD MAN'S INVITATION

When the Reverend Andrew Jackson Potter, the "Fighting Parson," returned home from the Civil War, he was asked to go to Walnut Creek, one Sunday, to preach.

The man who brought the message told him that there was a bunch of bad men down there who had made it known that they would fight any preacher who came that way, and that Mr. Potter would do well to be prepared for trouble or to stay away.

Mr. Potter said that he would go and he went. On entering the pulpit he saw the armed men seated close to the front, and he remarked calmly that he had heard there were certain persons who wanted to fight preachers, that he had come to preach or to fight, and that he was ready to do both.

Then he proposed that the affair should be done in good order, and that all should sit still until after the sermon, as most of those present had come to hear preaching.

When the sermon was over, if nothing but a fight would satisfy the trouble hunters, he would be glad to oblige them, and they could choose any place they wished for the battle.

He then read, sang, prayed, and preached. No one disturbed him, and good order reigned throughout the entire service.

When it was over, Mr. Potter announced that if any one wanted to fight, he was ready. Or, if they preferred, they would all go to dinner and have the fight later in the day.

He knew the leader of the bad men, and when the man approached him as he left the pulpit, Mr. Potter asked him, "Do you want to fight, Jim?" the reply was, "No, sir. I do not want to fight you. I want you to come home with me to dinner."

The invitation was accepted, and the fight was off for good.

Fargo Neal's

1. A new hombre moved into Goldville, buying out a saloon. "Ace" Harding was his name. He gathered together some of the local crooks and wanted to know why they couldn't hold up the stage. One reason, they told him, was Fargo Neal.

2. Ace hadn't heard of Fargo. His newfound pards soon told him. "Neal," one said, "is just about the saltiest shotgun guard thet Wells-Fargo ever hired." The boss thought that over, then thought up a scheme to get rid of Fargo.

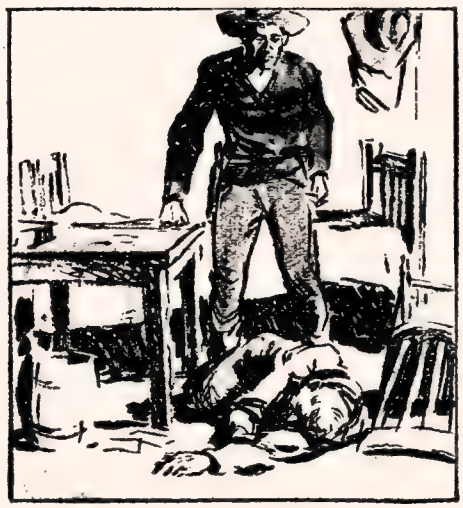
3. He sent one of the men over to the house of a good friend of Fargo's. The man's orders were to kill the old hombre. When that was done, Fargo would immediately hit the trail of the killer, and not ride on the stage next day.

4. It was an easy job for the case-hardened killer. He went to the shack of Fargo's friend, saw him playing solitaire, then went to the front door. He kicked it open. The old man looked up, startled. Then the killer fired.

Murder Trail

5. Some one heard the shot. The killer lit a shuck for Ace's saloon. Soon the murder was discovered. Every one knew that the murdered man—Jake Kilroy—was a friend of Fargo Neal's. A man ran to wake up Fargo.

6. Throwing on his clothes, Fargo Neal went racing for Kilroy's shack. He couldn't imagine who could have any reason for killing old Jake. The hombre was harmless and had nothing worth stealing. Fargo was cold with rage.



7. The messenger had not been lying, Fargo soon discovered. Jake Kilroy lay on the floor of his shack, limp in death. Fargo stood staring at him. He couldn't believe it. Who could have wanted to shoot poor old Jake?

8. Dawn broke before Fargo could get back to the Wells-Fargo office. There, he hunted up the manager. "Listen," he said, "Jake's murderer is in town. I'm going to get him. Get some one else as guard for this trip." The manager agreed.

9. Fargo next hunted up the marshal of Goldville. Together, they went back to the murder shack and looked for clews. They were just about to give up when Fargo saw something lying on the floor. He picked it up, and they both studied it.

10. It was a button off a man's shirt. Fargo had never seen one exactly like it. He realized that it had been dropped by the killer. If he could find a man from whose shirt a similar button was missing, he'd have Jake's murderer.

11. Fargo and the marshal left the shack. In the center of town a group of wildly excited hombres had gathered. The stage had been held up. The dying driver had managed to reach town and spread the news of the holdup.

12. Fargo dashed to the livery stable and got a horse. Throwing a saddle on the critter, he lit out of town. He saw now that the killing was a trick to keep him off the stage. He rode fast and soon came to the stalled coach.

13. At first glance, no one seemed to be alive. But Fargo soon discovered that the shotgun messenger was still breathing. He knelt beside the hombre, and with his last breath the guard told Fargo in what direction the bandits had gone.

14. Fargo followed them. He could see their sign occasionally. And then, after a ride of several hours, he sighted them. Sure that they were safe from pursuit, they had stopped to rest and eat. Fargo Neal went charging down on them.

15. The resulting gun fight was fast—and hot. The bandits saw Fargo coming in time to be ready for him. But that did them no good. Fargo knocked them all spinning, except Ace Harding, who escaped in the confusion.

16. But Fargo found something that made him forget that one hombre got away. One of the dead hombres wore a shirt which had buttons that matched the one from Jake's cabin. Fargo had saved the gold—and found Jake's killer.

Next Week: "A Rope For Fargo Neal."

Pardner's Vengeance

A True Story of the Wild West

By Kent Bennett

Author of "Redskin Reckoning," etc.

THE prospector braced himself unsteadily against the bar of the Delta Saloon. His tanned and freckled face was flushed, his red hair tousled. His blue eyes blinked like an owl's at noonday.

He licked his dry lips thirstily and brought his calloused palm down with a thump.

"Ginme drink," he mumbled thickly.

From behind the bar, "Butch" Penny watched Mike Tracey out of greenish, snake-cold, slitted eyes. His lip curled upward like a snarling dog's. He resembled a wolf about to spring.

"Where's yore dough?" he growled.

Mike's hand fished his pants pocket, but in vain. It was empty. He had spent his last dollar over that bar, as Penny had been aware before he asked the question. Penny had been looking Mike over. The prospector had no gun. He looked good-natured, not a fighter, not the sort to treasure up a wrong in his memory.

Penny reached for a bottle, hit

Mike over the head with it. As the prospector reeled dizzily and sank to the floor, Penny's partner, "Buck" Shelton got up from the card table where he had been playing poker. Together the two of them seized Mike by the heels and dragged him out into the back alley. There they left him.

"An easy mark," observed Shelton, as they turned into the saloon again.

"Yes," agreed Penny. "He won't remember what hit him, come daylight."

Penny underestimated the time it would take for Mike to revive. It was a cold night, and Mike had lain there not more than a couple of hours when the chill air brought back consciousness. As Penny had foretold, he did not know how he had come there.

He got to his feet. He was still thirsty, and the lights shining through the back door of the Delta and the uproarious noise within, told him he was near a saloon.

He staggered in and asked for a drink. Penny laid him out again, and this time with almost violence enough to break his head. Blood from a gash at the hair lines reddened his forehead like a crimson veil. He dropped like a pole-axed steer. For the second time, Penny and Shelton threw him into the alley.

It was daylight when Mike Tracey regained consciousness. This time he had an aching head and a bloody face to remind him of what had happened. He remembered where he had been and who had beaten him up so brutally.

Next he recalled why he had come to this town. It was on the way from the Mogollons to the WS Ranch, where his friend and partner, Charley Moore, was the top-hand cowboy.

Charley had been grubstaking him for years, and they owned claims scattered over four counties. None of the claims had showed up anything worth while, but Mike was satisfied that the one he had lately located at Mogollon was rich in gold and silver. He had come to tell Charley that their fortune was made.

He got to his feet, found his burro where he had staked it out the day before, and struck out for the WS Ranch. In his condition it was tough going. He arrived there early in the afternoon and told Charley what had happened to him in the Delta Saloon.

Charley Moore was a forceful man and a loyal friend. He was fighting mad. He saddled two horses, and the friends set out for town at a fast clip.

Penny and Shelton were both at the Delta bar when Charley strode into the place, his heels rapping the floor like hammers. Mike trailed in behind him.

"Yo're a nice pair o' coyotes!" roared Charley. "You dirty, mangy, low-lived lobos, you can poison an' beat up helpless, friendless tenderfoots. But when you crack Mike Tracey on the conk with a bottle, you got to reckon with Charley Moore."

The rating affected the two partners differently. Shelton turned red, Penny white.

"Charley," said Shelton, "I shore beg yore pardon. An' that goes for Butch, too. Don't it, Butch?" Penny nodded. "Ef we'd 'a' known this gent was yore pardner, Charley, we'd 'a' treated him diff'rent."

"Course, though," Penny put in, "the gent was kind o' proddy, an' I had to saw down his horns some."

At that, Charley flared up anew. "That's a danged lie, Penny, an' you know it," he growled. "An' you ought to know better'n to try to spring anything like that on a man that's known Tracey for ten years an' never saw him in a fightin' mood yet."

Penny's snaky eyes glittered balefully from between narrowed lids.

"Callin' me a liar, Moore?" he asked.

"Yes," shouted Charley, "an' any other man that tries to tell me Mike Tracey is on the prod."

Shelton intervened. He shouldered in between the two, and loudly called for a drink. Penny put out bottle and glasses.

All drank. Then Charley bought a drink. Penny treated. So did Mike, whose purse had been replenished by Charley. Round after round passed over the bar.

By late afternoon both Charley and Mike were drunk. Mike somehow got to the hotel and fell asleep. Charley announced his intention of leaving for the ranch.

"I'll shay goo'-by to Mike, first," he stammered. "Maybe I'll come back for 'nother drink."

With that he staggered out. Penny followed him with baleful gaze.

"I've got a score to settle with that hombre," he muttered.

"Sit down and have a drink with me," said a man, who was sitting at a near-by table.

Penny looked at him. He was a fat, suave, well-dressed stranger, with bald head, well trimmed beard, and small, crafty eyes. He had been hanging around the Delta all day, buying an occasional cigar, but never taking a drink of strong liquor.

Penny sat down. The sleek stranger ordered drinks and Shelton brought them. The stranger barely tasted his.

"Friend," he said to Penny in an undertone, "this man Moore is in on a find in the Mogollons. It is to my interest to see him killed. Do the job, and I'll give you a thousand dollars."

For a long minute, Penny sat gazing with half-closed eyes out into the gathering dusk. At last he spoke without turning his head.

"I'm yore man," he breathed in a thick voice.

II.

Charley Moore weaved his way in through the front door.

"Give's a drink, Shelt," he ordered. "Then I'm off for the ranch."

He reached to hitch up his pants, which were slipping, and fell to the floor. Penny looked at the stranger. The sleek man nodded. Penny got up and sauntered up to Charley, helped him to his feet. They had a drink.

"Now," said Penny, "I'll help you mount yore hoss."

Arm in arm they went out. As Penny lifted Charley toward the saddle, the cowboy's gun dropped onto the sidewalk. Penny picked it up, restored it to the scabbard, and tied it in, knotting the strings several times.

Then he suggested another drink. Charley refused. Penny urged him to "take just one more." Charley finally gave in. Penny helped him down from the saddle and into the saloon. He settled Charley down into a chair at a card table. He seated himself opposite.

Penny looked around the saloon. The sleek stranger had slipped away. There was nobody at the bar. The group around the card table at the rear of the room were

intent upon their game of stud. Nobody was looking but Shelton, who was behind the bar, and he nodded understandingly.

Penny drew his gun, shot Charley through the heart. The cowboy drooped forward. His head dropped onto his arms, which lay crosswise on the round table.

An elderly, gray-bearded man, drawn by the crack of the gun, came running in. It was "Uncle Billy" Antrim, a friend of Charley's. The smoke wreath from Penny's gun had not quite lifted.

"You all seen it," Penny spoke up. "He went for his gun. I had to do it in self-defense."

The card players did not speak. None of them had seen it. But Shelton nodded and spoke from his post behind the bar.

"Yeah," he said in his loud, assertive voice, "I seen it. It was a clear case o' self-defense."

Uncle Billy Antrim went up to the murdered man. He lifted the body in his arms, and dragged it outside, and across the street to the undertaker's.

He had noted that the dead man's arms lay crossed under his face, and that his shirt front was powder-burned. He also observed that the dead eyes were tranquil, indicating that Charley had had no expectation of death. He noticed the gun tied in the holster. It took him three or four minutes to untie those knots.

All these signs pointed to murder. It was no case of self-defense. Charley had been shot down without a moment's warning.

Uncle Billy was old and poor, almost friendless. He had no influence. It would be better for some one of weight to take up the fight.

He went out to the sidewalk. A young Mexican was leaning against an awning post, rolling a cigarette. His pony was at the hitch rack across the street. For a dollar, he promised to ride to the WS Ranch and report the killing of Charley.

Bill French, who owned and managed the WS, and his friend, Arthur Burr, of the SU Ranch, were at dinner when the news came. French, who thought a lot of Charley, got ready to leave for town at once and Burr went with him.

French looked up Uncle Billy and asked him a number of questions about the affair. Uncle Billy said he could not see how Charley could have gone for his gun and still have both hands under him when he had fallen forward on the table. And he said that his gun was securely tied into its holster with a hard knot and not the usual slipknot which cowboys use to prevent its jumping out when on the range.

Others in the saloon had told Billy that Charley and Penny had come in together, that they had seated themselves at the little table facing each other, that Shelton had brought them drinks from behind the bar, and that immediately after he got back to the bar, they had heard one shot and had jumped to their feet.

Penny had not been placed under arrest, so French, Burr, and Uncle Billy went to the home of the justice of the peace. He said he understood that the killing was justified, and did not want to issue a warrant.

"It was a cowardly murder," rapped out French, "and if you will not issue a warrant, I will arrest him on my own responsibility."

The justice then gave in, and made out a warrant. French and Burr went to the home of Penny and escorted him from there to the

hotel, where they kept watch over him all night.

In the morning a delegation of cowboys arrived from the WS. They wanted to lynch Penny on the spot, but French, who believed that legal justice must be done, talked them out of it.

Penny, who seemed to think up to then that he had done nothing to call for punishment, turned a sickly green and almost fainted.

He was taken to the county seat and there tried for murder. The evidence, except the perjured testimony of his partner, was all against him, and the judge charged the jury telling them that if they believed the evidence they had no alternative but to find Penny guilty.

The jurors did not understand English, and so the judge's charge had to be translated for them by an interpreter. It later developed that the interpreter had been influenced to garble his interpretation to favor Penny. Thus misled, the jury brought in a verdict of "not guilty," and Penny was set free.

III.

As a result of his exposure to the cold on the night he had been thrown into the alley, Mike Tracey developed a bad case of typhoid pneumonia on the afternoon that Charley was killed, and was lying helpless in the hospital at the time of Penny's arrest.

He was waiting outside the courthouse the afternoon of Penny's discharge, and stepped up to him as he came down the steps.

Smash! His clenched fist crashed into Penny's nose. A crimson stream spurted from it.

"He has broken my nose," screamed Penny, as he looked to Shelton and his other friends for help.

But they, looking in turn at the cowboys from the WS, who were there in a body, stood aloof.

Tracey stepped in again and landed a blow on Penny's solar plexus. The killer turned white. His knees buckled. He straightened up again, and Mike smashed him in the mouth. Penny spat out a couple of teeth.

Mike blackened both of his eyes. Then he hit the killer in the chin, and Penny went to the ground on all fours.

Penny's face was a horrible sight. He looked up in horrified amazement at the one-time easy-going man whom he had abused so shamefully without any reprisal.

"Enough," he mumbled through mangled lips.

"Oh, no," snapped Mike, "you'll never have enough as long as you and I are on earth. Every time I see you, I'm going to beat you up."

Penny turned imploring eyes to his partner.

"Gimme a gun, Shelt," he begged.

Mike nodded approvingly. He tapped the butt of the six-gun which he had been carrying ever since he got over pneumonia.

Penny noticed the action. He turned pale. Evidently he had expected to find Mike unarmed. Shelton saw his pallor. Plainly he was disgusted with Penny's cowardice.

"I guess you don't want no gun," he grunted.

"Get up, you coward, till I polish you off," barked Mike.

But Penny refused to get to his feet. Mike hauled off and landed a swing on the jaw that laid him out. Still he was conscious. Mike stood over him, looking down grimly.

"Listen," he barked. "This is only

the beginnin'. Every time I see you, I'm goin' to give the same dose, only stronger each time. Come on, now, get up and let me finish today's job."

But Penny cowered, refusing to move. The next morning, he was missing. His business was gone, anyhow. He had sold his interest in the Delta to pay his high-priced attorneys.

Mike, disappointed in his quest for Penny, found the interpreter and "polished him off" instead.

The man who had promised Penny a thousand dollars to kill Charley went to Mike with a proposal to buy the Mogollon claim. Uncle Billy Antrim, who had seen him whispering with Penny that fatal day, told Mike about it. And Mike was suspicious enough by now to give the fellow a terrible beating.

"Mike," protested Uncle Billy, "you used to be a reg'lar lamb. Now you are fighting every day. Yo're gittin' to be an awful cantankerous sort of hombre."

Mike grinned. "Not a bit of it, Uncle Billy," he said. "I'm just keepin' my hand in for my next meetin' with Penny."

Mike sold his share of the Mogollon mine for a goodly sum, and immediately set out in pursuit of Penny. And everywhere he caught up with the killer, he gave him a terrible thrashing. As Mike had promised him, each successive one was worse than its predecessor. The fourth one sent Penny to the hospital.

After that, Penny began to watch for the coming of Mike. As soon as he heard that Mike or any one looking like him was in town, he would quit that place and hurry to another.

He lived in constant terror. Life became a nightmare. He never had a dollar to spare, for he spent half his time looking for jobs, and he sometimes left a town without waiting to collect his wages. Usually he had to go on foot, for lack of money to pay his fare.

But at last he found peace in an obscure mining camp. Month after month passed with no sign of Mike Tracey, and Penny began to think he had finally shaken off his Nemesis. The fact was that Mike had run out of funds, and had gone back to Mogollon for more money.

After a few months, mainly by dint of bragging about his ability as a gunman, Penny got a job on the police force. Then the chief of police died, and Penny was given his place.

Penny began to breathe more freely. The star on his vest made him confident, arrogant even. With the help of the two other men on the force he felt that even if Mike Tracey should turn up, he would be able to get rid of him forever.

So on the day when he saw Mike Tracey on the street of that town, he was prepared to act. He called his two men together in the back room of a saloon, and there they agreed upon ways and means of killing off Mike.

"There is no use tryin' to arrest him," Penny told them. "He's a bad Injun, an' he'll never come peaceable. He's killed four or five men, an' he thinks no more of murderin' a man than you would of hurtin' a fly." Then he added another lie to whet their greed. "I understand there's a reward of a thousand dollars out for him, dead or alive."

Penny was sure that the end of Mike Tracey was at hand. Both of his pards were experienced gunmen. He had picked them for that.

One of them, Hank Peale, he knew to be as big a rascal as him-

self. "Tump" Coker, the other man, he did not know so well. But he was brave and could shoot, and, under the impression that Mike was a desperate criminal, Penny felt, Coker would not hesitate to use his gun.

They came upon Mike in a barber shop. They surprised him, and Penny could have shot him through the back, were it not that he wanted to torture Mike mentally before killing him.

At Penny's command of "Hands up," Mike whirled. Penny looked him over, up and down, from head to foot and back again, with a fiendish grin.

"Well, Tracey," he hissed between gritted teeth, "I got you at last."

Mike did not budge, but his brain was racing furiously seeking a way out. But apparently there was none.

Enjoying his triumph and the discomfiture of his enemy, Penny slowly raised his gun.

"I'm goin' to gut-shoot you, Tracey," he barked, "just so you'll have a chance to remember me for a while before you die."

His forefinger sought the trigger. But as he was about to press it a hand struck his wrist upward, and the bullet hit the ceiling. It was Coker who had intervened.

"Yo're all wrong, chief," he said. "I know this man. He's a dead square hombre."

Penny's eyes blazed. He snarled like a wild cat.

"Take care o' this mug, Hank," he cried to Peale, "an' I'll handle the other——"

Coker hurled himself against Penny, who in turn bumped into Peale, spoiling his aim. Mike Tracey took advantage of the mix-up to get out his own gun.

Crack! The bullet struck Penny just above the heart.

He bounded up and forward, then fell on his face. He struggled to get his gun up, but fell flat again. He was done for.

They carried him to his room on a shutter. Two hours later, the murderer of Charley Moore passed away.

The murder of Charley Moore occurred at Cooney, New Mexico, in 1883. Through the delay of the grand jury in finding an indictment, Penny was not tried till a year later. He was defended by the best criminal lawyer in the Territory, but it was solely the crookedness of the interpreter that saved him. The interpreter was handled by politicians to whom Penny had delivered votes, probably in anticipation of some such difficulty as this murder trial.

The claims jointly owned by Moore and Tracey were in Socorro and Grand Counties, New Mexico, and Graham and Apache, Arizona. Had Charley lived and held onto them, he could have become enormously wealthy, for the copper claims owned by him at Morenci, Arizona, proved so rich that their ultimate owners, the Phelps-Dodge company, found it worth while to build a railroad to the camp. —THE EDITOR.

HC

Fiddlin' Joe's Song Corral

This department is for the purpose of preserving the old cowboy songs and Western range ballads, and their history. Readers can help in this work by sending in any such songs that they know, especially those handed down by word of mouth by parents, grandparents, and other old-time Westerners. The story of the song, how it came to be written, and the facts on which it is based should accompany the words whenever possible.

Address all letters to Fiddlin' Joe, care of Street & Smith's Wild West Weekly, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

I DON'T know how yuh folks feel about fragments of songs. Personally, I like 'em. Lots of times, thet's all we've got left of some ol' song thet yuh kin imagine was sung through all the camps of the West fer years, gradually bein' pared down, yuh might say, until only the most pointed lines are left.

Send in any yuh find, folks.

An' now, how's fer another song about Jesse James? It was sent in tuh the Corral a long time ago by S. H. Logan, of Arkansas.

"The Day that Jesse Died" was written by George Maddox, at one time a member of the James gang. It was given tuh Mr. Logan by an ol' Confederate soldier named Blackwell, who was at one time a member of Quantrell's band of guerrillas in Missouri.

THE DAY THAT JESSE DIED

By George Maddox

I'm an unpretentious citizen that lives at Cracker Neck,
Whose character for many years has been without a speck;
I gave up all my foolishness and ways of worldly pride,
Like cutting hair and whiskers, on the day that Jesse died.

You didn't know our Jesse, so you couldn't know his worth;
There never was a smarter or a braver man on earth;
We fought together, and I've heard Bill Anderson confess
For expeditious massacre there was no other man like Jess.

When Quantrell sent old Jennison a-flying up the Kaw,
And shot down every red-leg, man or woman, that he saw,

I got, through constant practice, to be handy with the gun,
But not to be compared with Jess, Missouri's favorite son.

At last, when peace had been proclaimed, the government allowed
It didn't have much use for Jess and others of our crowd;
But all the same we had to live comporting to our rank,
So one fine day at Liberty we opened up a bank.

Don't understand I want to boast, but with the aid of Jess
Our banking operations became a great success;
And in whatever State or town, by either day or night,
We never struck a bank but honored all our drafts at sight.

Then Jess he got ambitious, and a little blood was spilt
In an effort to run railroads, like a Gould or Vanderbilt.
Of course, one killing more or less don't matter in a wreck;
But, just the same, I'd had enough and went back to the Neck.

Now, this is merely leading up to what I had to say
In recolleotion of the time when Jesse passed away.
I'd gone up to the city and, as near as I recall,
Had done the sights on Battle Row and struck the Marble Hall.

I'd ordered up another drink, while waiting to be fed,
When some one at the door sung out that Jesse James was dead.
I gave a jump, the like of which I never jumped before.
And three good fingerfuls of rye lay wasted on the floor.

I couldn't wait to fill her up, or stay in there to eat;
The boys were calling, "Extra *Star!*" like demons in the street;
The town was in a tumult for the latest news from Jess;
Those Kansas City people knew him pretty well, I guess.

I walked as in a dream, the old guerrilla days came back,
And once again I was with Jess upon the red-leg's track.

I heard his whoop, and saw him charge the center of the town;
And every time his pistol cracked, an enemy went down.

So, burning for excitement, as an angry person will,
I helped to hang a darky from the bridge below the hill;
Since cooling off, I've once or twice acknowledged to our shame
We captured the wrong darky—but we hung him just the same.

And then I jumped upon my horse and rode with might and main,
And till we stood in Cracker Neck I never pulled a rein,
While all the boys came eagerly and heard with bated breath
The sorrowful particulars of poor old Jesse's death.

Perhaps you won't believe it, but we sat around and cried,
In thinking how his spirit must be feeling mortified.
You see, we all liked Jesse, though he was a little light
An' free in shooting at the boys, when things weren't going right.

The funeral we gave him must have made his spirit smile.
Old Clay and Cracker Neck turned out and did it up in style;
The sermon was a corker, and we sang a favorite hymn,
And let me say we sang it with considerable vim.

But from that day I've never put the scissors to my hair,
Nor given to the thought of dress my customary care;
I hang around the Neck, a-sort of longing, I confess,
For the bright hour when I shall be with Quantrell and with Jess.

The times ain't what they used to be; Missouri's day is past.
I always knew those good old times were much too good to last.
The age of chivalry, which was Missouri's boast and pride,
Was put aside forever on the day that Jesse died.

An' now, folks, it's good luck till next week. So long!

The Wranglers Corner

The Range Boss will be glad to consider contributions from beginners and amateur writers and artists.

The contributions will be judged on their merits as amateur contributions. The work of professionals is not desired.

Manuscripts should preferably be typed, on one side of the paper only, and double spaced. However, full consideration will be given to manuscripts neatly hand-written in ink.

The author's name and address and age should appear on the first page.

Stories should not exceed five hundred words, and verses should not exceed twenty lines. Only Western subjects should be chosen.

Drawings should be in India ink on plain white paper. No pencil or crayon drawings can be used. Only Western subjects should be chosen.

All published material will be paid for at good space rates.

Manuscripts that are not used cannot be returned, but an effort will be made to return drawings, provided it is especially requested, and a stamped, addressed envelope is inclosed for that purpose.

Address all contributions to the WRANGLERS CORNER, c/o Street & Smith's Wild West Weekly, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SO it's Artists' Night!" whoops Buck Foster, settlin' back in his chair an' givin' his glorious mustache a tug. "Waal, now, thar's nothin' I like better'n encouragin' the younkers. Course, they can't draw good as I could when I was startin' out, but——"

"What do yuh mean, startin' out?" snorts Joe Scott. "The only thing yuh ever started out of was the Circle J when thar was work to do. An' the only thing yuh ever drawed was wages from Billy West that yuh never earned."

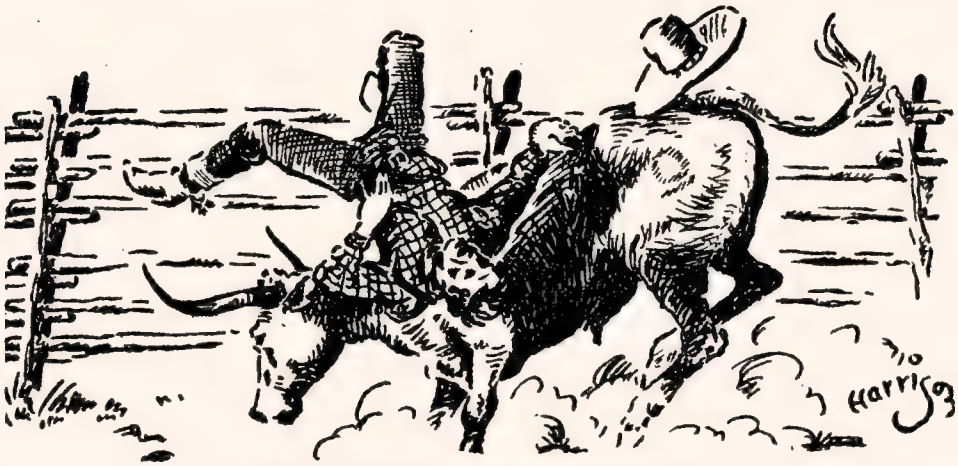
"By heifers!" yelps Buck. "I tell yuh I kin draw a pitcher of a cow thet a calf would reckernize as its maw an' foller! I——"

"We sho' want to see the real pictuahs, Boss," busts in Kid Wolf. "How ah they coming in now?"

"Plumb fast an' good, too," we tells him. "Thar's enough on hand right now ter run a hull month of Artists' Nights. So thar's still hope fer artists what don't see their drawin's come out in print this week, an' thar always'll be if they keep sendin' 'em in. Hyar's the fust one."

"Thet's shore the real thing," says Calamity Boggs. "Muh heart goes out tuh thet pore waddy. He'll prob'ly bust a laig or cut his arm an' git it infected an' have tuh have it ampitated."

"Or more likely jest pick hisself up an' try bull-doggin' the cow crit-



By Roy Harrison, Kansas City, Missouri

ter ag'in," puts in Fargo Neal, with a wink at Shorty Stevens.

"By the way," we speaks up, "them artists an' writers an' poets had ought ter tell us their age when they sends their work in. If they tells us their age, the readers'll reckernize true talent when they see it in younkers or old-timers, an' give credit whar credit's due."

An' here's this:

THE BUCKSKIN LAD

By Lawrence M. Quimby

14 years

Baskin, Louisiana

It was about two hours before sundown when the "Buckskin Lad" came in sight of Goldville. It was a new boom town, and men in miners clothes were swarming all around.

News had reached the Lad that there was a gang of outlaws stealing the gold from the miners as they found it.

He had now come into Main Street and was glancing at the signs in front of the buildings. He came to the largest of the buildings and pulled his paint horse to a halt. The sign before the building read:

ALL HOMBRES INTENDING TO STAKE A CLAIM REPORT HERE
SAM MCCALISTER, Prop.

As he had not seen any one in several days, he decided to dismount and have a little talk.

As he dismounted, he made a striking figure. He was five feet ten inches tall, and he had gained his name from his clothes. He wore buckskin from the bottom of his trousers to the top of his shirt, and on his right thigh was an ivory-butted .45 six-gun.

As he stepped upon the porch of the building, two men stepped out of the door and headed for their horses. The Lad glanced at them and then turned back to the door and went in. The man he saw at the desk was grinning wolfishly, but at sight of the Lad, the grin changed to an oily smile.

"Howdy, stranger," he greeted.

"Good evening," said the Lad mildly.

"You want to stake a claim?" asked McCalister.

"Not exactly," said the Lad. "I jest heard there was a bunch of yeller-bellies a-stealing the miners' gold, and thought I'd take a hand."

"Waal, thet gang is plenty tough," said McCalister. "They'd snap your head off and feed yuh tuh the chickens. Yuh better take my advice and clear out, 'cause it's about time they struck again, but we got the gold hid."

The Lad didn't like the man's looks, and he felt mighty suspicious. But he had to play a fox's game.

"Well, I g-guess th-that is too tough for me, so I guess me and old Paint better be high-tailing it."

The Lad could see the mirth in the

man's eyes as he got up and walked to the door. He knew the man thought he was scared. But he had a big surprise coming.

He mounted his horse and rode about three hundred yards out of town. He dismounted and led his horse into a bunch of mesquites, as the Montana sun was sinking. The sunset was glorious, but he didn't have time to watch it.

About an hour after dark, the Buckskin Lad was crouched about one hundred yards from McCalister's office. Six mounted men rode up and dismounted, and went inside.

The Lad crept up to a window of McCalister's private office. He heard voices inside. One man was saying:

"Yuh say there's a younker thinking he'd take a hand in this, boss?" asked the man.

"Yeah, but I skeered him half to death," said McCalister, "and we better git that job done while ever'body's eatin' supper. Now remember I got them crazy miners to hide the gold in the old deserted cabin in the middle of town. Let's go!"

The Lad sprang back from the wall and ran as fast as he could toward the middle of town. He came to a shack that didn't have any sign of life about it. He saw a pile of rubbish about ten yards from the shack, and crouched behind it, pulling out his six-gun.

He didn't have to wait long until seven men came toward the shack; when they got in range, they saw him and shot at him. He lifted his gun and let the hammer fall. The first man screamed and dropped in his tracks.

Then gun thunder deafened the town, but it didn't last long, and when it was over, seven outlaws lay dead. And, as the smoke cleared, there was a lad clad in buckskin heading out of town.

"Good fer Señor Quimby!" whoops Buck. "Who's next, Boss?"

"Thar's more in the bag, but we'll have ter let 'em go till next time," we speaks up, afore Calamity kin git in a squawk. "Lights out!"

THE RANGE BOSS.

COMIN' NEXT WEEK!

THE OKLAHOMA KID'S DEATH TUNE

Novelette

By LEE BOND

He sings it loud an' clear an' beats time with a pair o' flamin' Colt .45s, while Depity Ed Sparks howls an' cusses.

TOMMY ROCKFORD DODGES THE GALLOWS

Novelette

By WALKER TOMPKINS

But when the young lawman finally holsters his smokin' guns there's a few hombres round about who ain't so lucky when it comes to dodgin' things.

CRAZY Q JOINS A GOLD RUSH

Novelette

By GEORGE C. HENDERSON

Old Bonanza McIvor leads the rush, an' in spite of everything thet the Diamondback killers kin do, Crazy Q sees to it thet every one gits a square deal.

Also stories of Hungry and Rusty, by Samuel H. Nickels; Fargo Neal—and other characters.

ALL STORIES COMPLETE 10 CENTS A COPY

ORDER IN ADVANCE FROM YOUR NEWS DEALER

Free TO MOTORISTS WITH OIL EATING CARS

MINER'S AMAZING MINERAL DISCOVERY SAVES UP TO 95% OF NEW RING AND REBORE COSTS—IF YOUR MOTOR WASTES OIL AND GAS . . . IF IT HAS LOST THAT "NEW CAR" POWER, SPEED AND QUIET . . . SEND THE COUPON BELOW—NOW—FOR FREE SAMPLE. BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR SALESMEN!

SAVES UP TO 50% ON OIL
INCREASES GAS MILEAGE UP TO 45%*

Here is a simple, inexpensive, time-saving method of checking oil and gas waste caused by worn rings and cylinders. Ovrhaul, the amazing mineral product, actually performs the important benefits of expensive rings and rebore at but a fraction of the cost—in only a few minutes' time and without any special tools or equipment.

Ovrhaul, the original patented mineral motor reconditioner, has revolutionized the cost of motor upkeep for thousands of motorists. *Sensational records of oil and gas savings have been reported by Independent Laboratory and road tests, great State Universities, Automotive engineers and editors of well-known mechanical publications. Ovrhaul has convinced the most skeptical—Give it a trial and it will convince you.

STOP WASTING MONEY!

Give your car a chance to be a joy and pleasure again! Know the thrill of stepping on the gas without the fear of how much it is going to cost. Give Ovrhaul an opportunity to put your motor back on the paying side. A single application through the spark plug openings will last up to 10,000 miles and costs less than spark plugs.

TAKES ONLY 30 MINUTES

Before you spend up to $150.00 for new rings and rebore—send for a free sample of this amazing mineral and find out why nearly a half million motorists decided to "ovrhaul" their motor. Let us show you why, when rings and cylinders are worn, this phenomenal product will increase the compression—quiet the noises—give your car added power and speed—reduce the gas and oil waste—and pay for itself many times over in what it saves.

PROOF! FROM USERS!

Nearly a half million motorists and service station attendants have used Ovrhaul in place of new rings and rebore. In our files we have thousands of unsolicited letters. We reprint here only a few—the originals of which are open to inspection in our offices.

"Nearly doubled gas mileage." C. A., Colo.

"Checked oil pumping." J. W. McG., Pa.

"Have been using Ovrhaul for the past nine thousand miles and find it to do everything you said." M. H., New York

"Ovrhaul that I installed has done wonders to the cars and the people praise your product." B. G. A., Pa.

"Stopped smoking after ten days." E. H., Ill.

"New Rings unnecessary." L. J. W., S. D.

"Raised compression—cut oil consumption." F. C., Mich.

"Used 68 gallons of gas on 1250 mile trip (about 18 miles to a gallon) BEFORE USING OVRHAUL. Made same trip AFTER and used only 48 gallons. (which is 26 miles to the gallon)." P. D. C., Ind.

"Increased Gas Mileage 50%." M. P. A., Va.

"Old car ran like a new machine." J. G. B., Ore.

"300 miles on one quart of oil—formerly only 75 miles." H. N. L., Ohio

BIG MONEY MAKING TERRITORIES OPEN!

18,000,000 cars need Ovrhaul. This enormous market of men and women with money to spend is proving a bonanza for Distributors and Salesmen. Desirable and big profit territory on an exclusive basis still open. If you would like to get in the BIG MONEY, let us tell you about our plan and show you the plain dollar and cent facts about what others are doing. Ovrhaul is fully covered by patents for your protection and legal action is taken against all infringers.

Proof! From Salesmen and Distributors!

Wide awake men tell us Ovrhaul is the fastest selling and biggest repeating item they have seen in years. They are cashing in BIG. Below are only a few—others have made more—some less—these show the opportunity.

"I have sold 1204 Ovrhauls, making a total gross profit of $2,716.46. My best month, $834.60. I find 99 8/10% are more than satisfied."—B., Wisconsin; "My profits have been as high as $78.80 in a single day."—R., Fla.; "Send ½ Gross. Last six dozen lasted 3 days."—E. H. H., Maryland; "By the end of 60 days I will be selling 500 Ovrhauls a week."—T. K., Oklahoma; "I have sold as many as 60 Ovrhauls in one day."—M. H. P., Conn.

GET YOUR FREE SAMPLE NOW!

Send THIS COUPON

Your motor takes more punishment during hot weather than at any other time. Use the coupon or send your name and address on a penny postcard and mail for free sample of this amazing mineral—and full details of a real money-making opportunity.

B. L. MELLINGER, Pres.
OVRHAUL CO., K-918
KANSAS CITY, MO.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

(paste on Postcard and Mail)

B. L. MELLINGER, Pres.
OVRHAUL CO., K-918, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Without cost or obligation rush me at once a FREE SAMPLE and your big money-making plan.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

Make and year of car or truck.....

TESTING LABORATORY REPORT

Below is reprinted a copy of the certified laboratory report of the Industrial Testing Laboratory.

"We hereby certify that we have tested OVRHAUL UNDER WORKING CONDITIONS—1928 Pontiac driven 72,000 miles. TOTAL GAIN in compression 92 lbs. (nearly normal according to manufacturer's specifications). OVRHAUL does NOT scratch, abrade or otherwise injure the motor. The 'pick-up' speed, and hill climbing performance were increased ENORMOUSLY. Car runs practically as well as when new."

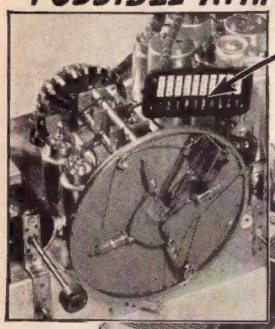
There is no guesswork about Ovrhaul. Proved harmless to finest motors. Contains no mica, graphite or harmful abrasives.

YOU CAN SELL IT WITH CONFIDENCE!

LATEST 20-TUBE MIDWEST TUNES ITSELF BY ELECTRIC MOTOR..... JUST TOUCH A BUTTON!

ONLY MIDWEST'S DIRECT-FROM-FACTORY POLICY MAKES THIS AND OTHER SENSATIONAL FEATURES POSSIBLE AT AMAZINGLY LOW PRICES!

SAVE UP TO 50% DIRECT FROM MIDWEST FACTORY



20 TUBES 6 BANDS SUPER POWERED TO BRING IN WEAK OVERSEAS STATIONS

30 DAYS FREE TRIAL

MAGIC MOVIE DIAL

Now, Midwest gives you today's finest world-wide overseas reception. Note that the dial on the chassis shows only the broadcast band. Then, flip 6-wave-band-switch, and, instantly, 5 additional bands are projected on the dial.

A VITAL engineering advancement, Midwest's Electric Touch-Button Tuning is entirely automatic and the sensation of the radio world! Ten touch buttons completely control the set. Touching any button turns set "on" and tunes in desired station. Nine other favorite stations are automatically and perfectly brought in . . . Zip . . . Zip . . . Zip . . . as fast as you can touch buttons. No more dial twiddling!

Why be content with an ordinary 10, 12 or 14-tube set, when you can buy a 20-tube Super DeLuxe Motorized Midwest for the same money. It will surprise and delight you with its brilliant world-wide reception on 6 bands. You save 50%—and get 30 days free trial in your own home — when you buy direct from the factory at wholesale prices. You are triply protected with Foreign Reception Guarantee, One-Year Warranty and Money-Back Guarantees.

MAGIC MYSTIC BRAIN

"Mystic Brain" interprets your touch button signals and controls electric motor. Ten contact fingers can be easily set to any ten stations you desire

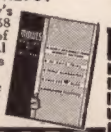
TERMS AS LOW AS $1.00 A WEEK

You have a whole year to pay for your Midwest on the easiest and most convenient of credit terms. Send for the FREE 40-page catalog today—and begin to enjoy motorized radio at its best, right now!

Send for FREE 40-PAGE CATALOG!

See for yourself that Midwest offers today's greatest radio values! Write for new 1938 Factory-To-You Catalog showing 40 pages of radios, chassis and features—in their natural colors. Select the one you like on 30 days FREE TRIAL in your own home.

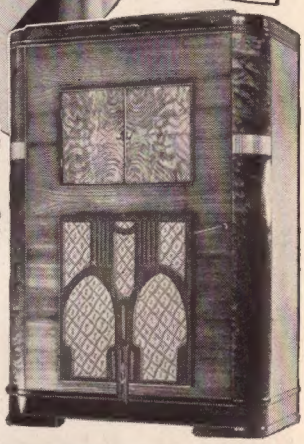
Service Men! *Join nation-wide Midwest service organization. Write for free details*



only $49.95

FACTORY-TO-YOU NEW LOW BASE PRICE CHASSIS

The new 1938 Midwest consoles are triumphs of the furniture art. The Trio-Sonic Reproducers (3 speakers), installed in this 20-tube console were especially developed for use with Double Power Beam Output Tubes



PASTE COUPON ON 1¢ POSTCARD...OR WRITE TODAY.

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
Dept. AA42 Cincinnati, O.

Send me your new FREE catalog and complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer (Special offer and prices prevail only when dealing direct with factory by mail.)

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

User-Agents Make Easy Extra Money. Check Here ☐ for details.

MIDWEST RADIO CORP.

DEPT. AA-42 — CINCINNATI, OHIO, U.S.A.

Established 1920 — Cable Address MIRACO...All Codes

New 6-Volt TRINDL Electric ARC WELDER

PATENTS PENDING

WORKS ON STORAGE BATTERY OR 110 VOLT LIGHT CIRCUIT

RETAILS FOR **3.75** EA.

A REAL WELDER

Men, here is the hottest specialty item that has come along in years. A real honest to goodness electric arc welder that does a man size job. Built sturdily of the finest materials. Requires no mechanical knowledge—any one can use. Every demonstration should make a sale. This new Trindl Electric Arc Welder is made possible by the invention of a low voltage carbon which gets white hot from the current of an ordinary 6 volt storage battery such as in your automobile. It only uses about 20 to 25 amperes of current which is about the same current drain as 4 headlight bulbs, yet develops about 7,000 degrees of heat.

Melts Iron and Steel Instantly

The Trindl Welder is simple to use. Expert welding can be done by anyone. The Trindl Arc Welder is the only battery welder that, after a rigid test, has been approved by the Automotive Test Laboratories of America. It is ideal for making permanent fender repairs—also for broken castings, radiators, cylinders, water jackets, holes in auto bodies, hog troughs, boilers, tanks, milk cans, radios, batteries, etc. Iron, Steel, Brass, Copper and Tin can be worked on for a quick and permanent repair. The repaired part will be as strong as before.

NEW 110 VOLT CONVERTER MAKES FULL SIZE PROFESSIONAL UNIT

This new converter is used on any 110 volt-60 cycle electric light socket in place of a storage battery. It is especially designed to be used with the Trindl Electric Arc Welder—COSTS LESS THAN A GOOD BATTERY—The combination makes a full size professional electric arc welder that everybody can use. Ideal for fender and repair shop needs. This is a sensation, not only in price but also in actual results. The converter represents the same fine construction and engineering skill as the arc welder. The complete outfit including the transformer, is easily portable so that it can be brought right to the job.

USERS SWEAR BY IT

—the price is so low that now anyone can afford to have a real welding outfit. Think of the profit you can make introducing this Trindl Welder and Converter—a simple five minute demonstration should make a sale to every interested prospect, especially when they hear the amazingly low price. Garages, radio and battery men, tinners, sheet metal workers, janitors, farmers and homeowners all need the Trindl Welder and Converter.

FACTS

Here are just a few excerpts from the many letters of praise we have received from Trindl Electric Arc boosters.

"Please find enclosed for 12 welders by return mail for I am about sold out now. They are selling fine."—W. C. Anderson, Nebr.

"Received my Trindl Arc Welder and am both pleased and surprised."—Louis F. Glier, Ohio.

"Results are very gratifying with your welder. I am enclosing an order for 12 more Electric Arc Welders."—Nelson O. Lyster, Florida.

"I received my welder, and it is a regular repair shop in itself."—J. R. Harper, La.

"I sold 4 of your Trindl Electric Arc Welders in three minutes."—C. Gillies, Canada.

"I sold 9 welders in my first ten calls."—F. W. Stice, Iowa.

UP TO 150% PROFIT TO YOU

$10.50 a day profit for you for only selling 6 Trindl Arc Welders. No matter where you turn, you will find people who will want to buy arc welders from you. Garages, shop men, radio repair men, farmers, homeowners, mechanics, janitors, all of them need Trindl Electric Arc Welders. Be the man in your territory to clean up with Trindl.

Act Now!

There are big profits and a steady business waiting for you taking care of your territory for us. Don't let someone else get in before you—Send coupon Today.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

TRINDL PRODUCTS,
2229-SS Calumet Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

Yes! Rush me free particulars of how I can make big money with Trindl Electric Arc Welders and Converters. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Local Address .....

City .....

State .....

TRINDL PRODUCTS

2229-SS Calumet Ave. CHICAGO, ILL.